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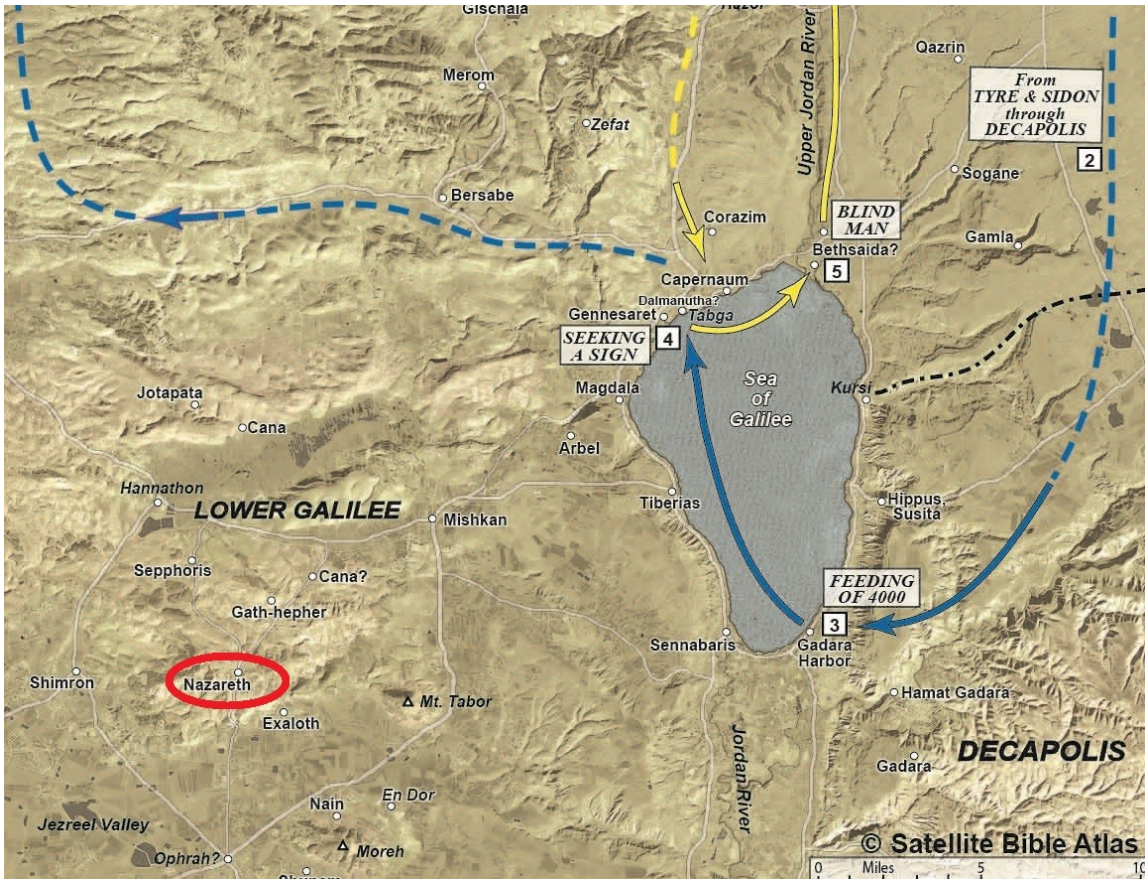
1. Jesus

Preparatory reading: Luke Chapter 2 and Matthew Chapter 1 and 2.

We begin a new series of studies, and I was moved to put forward some of the lessons that have taken me a long time to learn, in the hope that Christians will not make the same mistakes as I did. I have called the series “Christ the Golden thread”, an “Introduction to Christianity”, because Jesus Christ is the thread which sews the pages of Scripture together, sews our lives together and mends every aspect of our sinful life as we travel towards the heavens. Jesus is where we begin our journey and where we shall finish it.

This study must begin with a brief life of the Person who has been the most significant figure in History, and that according to Time magazine was Jesus of Nazareth. This controversial figure lived for most of His life in Nazareth, which town was set in a bowl on top of the Nazareth ridge north of the Jezreel Valley. Nazareth was a relatively isolated village in the time of Jesus with a population, it is suggested, of about 500 persons. "Nazareth is not mentioned in ancient Jewish sources earlier than the third century AD. This likely reflects its lack of prominence both in Galilee and in Judea." Strange originally calculated the population of Nazareth at the time of Christ as "roughly 1,600 to 2,000 people" but, in a subsequent publication that followed more than a decade of additional research, revised this figure down to "a maximum of about 480." In 2009, Israeli archaeologist Yardenna Alexandre excavated archaeological remains in Nazareth that date to the time of Jesus in the early Roman period. Alexandre told reporters, "The discovery is of the utmost importance since it reveals for the very first time a house from the Jewish village of Nazareth.



Jesus was conceived in Nazareth, *Luk 1:26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy God sent the angel Gabriel to a town in Galilee named Nazareth. Luk 1:27 He had a message for a young woman promised in marriage to a man named Joseph, who was a descendant of King David. Her name was Mary. After Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, just south of Jerusalem, He was taken by His parents to Egypt, to avoid persecution, and returned to live in Nazareth, Luk 2:39 And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. Luk 2:40 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him*.

There is little written about His childhood, except that He was precocious and at 12 years old we find Him in the temple precincts, *Luk 2:46 And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. Luk 2:47 And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers*. Just how He spent His youth is a mystery, but He must have constrained Himself when He saw the sick and needy, and although He could work miracles, He withheld His power, because the Bible says that the first miracle occurred in Cana, *Joh 2:11 This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him*. It must have developed the compassion in Him for suffering humanity, because He was not yet permitted to exercise the supernatural powers, although He would do what He could with His natural

human kindness. Perhaps He was becoming the “man of sorrows” by living among His afflicted fellow man.

As a Jew He would have been familiar with the Synagogue in Nazareth, *Luk 4:16 Jesus traveled to Nazareth, the town where he grew up. On the Sabbath day he went to the synagogue as he always did. He stood up to read*. ERV. Although He was a familiar figure, He was not yet a controversial figure, but He must have been viewed with some awe as His behaviour was above reproach and knowledge of the Scripture perfect. Of course He was exposed to the base components of life, *Heb 4:15 Jesus understands every weakness of ours, because he was tempted in every way that we are. But he did not sin!* CEV. Nothing is said of this period of His earthly sojourn and we assume that He just got on with life and being tested by its fickle fortunes.

He may have already met many of the people that He would come to know as disciples, Peter for example, through His employment as a τέκτων, travelling through Galilee. Perhaps He bought fish in Galilee from His friends in Capernaum by the sea, where He exchanged food for His labour. He worked until He was 30 years old as a “tekton”, *Mar 6:3 This is the builder, the son of Mary, and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon, isn't it? His sisters are here with us, aren't they?" And they were offended by him.* ISV.

The Ancient Greek noun tektōn (τέκτων) is a common term for an artisan/craftsman, in particular a carpenter, woodworker, or builder. The term is frequently contrasted with an ironworker, or smith (χαλκεύς) and stone-worker or mason (λιθολόγος, λαξευτής). You get the cognates, architect, tectonic, and technical which are related to the word τέκτων. There would have been a lot of building work in Sepphoris, just a few miles down the hillside to the north of Nazareth. It was one of the capital cities of the Galilee and it's the first capital of Herod's son, who is an independent Jewish client king of Rome during the lifetime of Jesus. Sepphoris is a beautiful, wealthy city. It's a Jewish city but like most wealthy Jewish cities in the Greco-Roman period, its architectural statements are done in Greco-Roman style. I think that Jesus would have been in demand for doing high standard building work and would have been paid well.

Nazareth was dirt poor, in fact it was looked down upon by many, and when one of the disciple was introduced to Jesus, he said, *Joh 1:45 Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. Joh 1:46 And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see*.

As much as our curiosity would like to know of Jesus’ formative years, his youth and early manhood, there is not given. We all have our own lives to live before God, not men *Rom 14:7 We do not live for ourselves only, and we do not die for*

ourselves only. Rom 14:8 ***If we live, it is for the Lord that we live, and if we die, it is for the Lord that we die.*** *So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord*. Jesus set us an example.

In our day, when we expect to know everyone's business, when newspapers print all of the trivia of the rich and famous, from what they had for breakfast, what they did on a particular day, what ails them, to what their stylist gave them to wear. It is very curious that we do not also have a better account of Jesus early years, after all, when the Gospels were written, the writers had access to people who knew Jesus, many of whom were alive. They had access to His mother, brothers and sisters and disciples, all the people who were the first Christians had first hand testimony, eye witness accounts, *1Jn 1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; 1Jn 1:2 (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;*)

There must have been people who knew Jesus from His youth, but the Bible is silent on this subject. It is as if everyone who knew something about Jesus youth was sworn to secrecy about it. Did Jesus ever speak Himself about His upbringing, and did not the disciples ask Him about it? He was seemingly, too ordinary to admit greatness, *Mar 6:2 And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? Mar 6:3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him*.

There is also no description of what He looked like, and this is perfectly in line with His humility. I imagine that if I asked you to write a portrait of Christ you would find it hard to put down more than a few pages on this Person, despite the global influence that He had. He almost recedes from view the more you endeavour to look for Him.

That quiet period of youth was to change radically when He was about 30 years old, exploding into action. In His ministry which covered a short period of time, 18 months being the shorter estimate, to just over 3 years being the upper estimate, He said enough and did enough to have a massive influence over mankind. In fact, I do not know of any man who has achieved as much as Jesus did in His short time with us, and His legacy was not in His physical descendants, because He left none, but in His spiritual descendents. About 33% of the Gospels are devoted to the last week of His ministry, and 10% of the Gospels to the crucifixion. You get some idea of what is important in Jesus life.

One might have expected Jesus to have been a bit more supportive towards the priesthood and the religious leaders, to be seen to be on the same team, but He seems to be alienated from them at the very beginning of His ministry. Throughout His ministry He constantly alienates people until He is crucified, *Act 4:27 Here in Jerusalem, Herod and Pontius Pilate got together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel. Then they turned against your holy Servant Jesus, your chosen Messiah. Act 4:28 They did what you in your power and wisdom had already decided would happen*. CEV. The world is against Him, yet despite this He transforms people, people like Paul, the great enemy of the Christ and the Christians, who becomes one of His most dedicated and fearless supporters, being converted in what we call "a Damascus Road" experience.

Jesus short ministry was filled with teachings, miracles, confrontations and a great love for the poor. It demonstrated to the people who would receive Him, that He was no ordinary man, but that He came with a purpose, *1Ti 1:15 This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. 1Ti 1:16 Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting*.

The purpose was not isolated from the rest of the Creation, *Rom 8:22 For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. Rom 8:23 And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body*. Jesus put forward a world view which is completely different from mortal men, because He saw the Universe as it was created, and He could do so because He is the Creator, the Author of Life, not just the life that now is but the life which is to come.

The uniqueness of the Christian culture can be seen in its attitude to knowledge. This says it better that I can, and I am grateful to Kurt Mahlburg "Cross and Culture" website, for expressing it,

> **"Europe inherited from Jesus a set of assumptions about the nature of reality that no other culture had."**
> **The universe actually exists**. Eastern philosophies taught that everything is an illusion. What point is there in studying an illusion? By contrast, the first declaration of Scripture is, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." It actually exists, so it can actually be studied.
>
> **The universe is orderly**. Greek, Roman and Hindu beliefs propose multiple gods competing to run the universe. But an enchanted world like this doesn't lead people to search for "laws of nature". If the planets are themselves gods, why would they follow

established laws? The God Jesus spoke of, however, is a God of order, not chaos. And by inference, so is the world he created.

"Human beings became scientific because they expected law in nature; and they expected law in nature because they believed in a lawgiver."

People have confidence to investigate the world. Indigenous faiths taught that there were spirits in the trees, rivers and mountains —that creation itself is divine. So poking around trying to study these things could anger the spirits—and this is one of the reasons many cultures never tried. Christians also believe in angels and demons, but in Genesis 1:28 they read God's command, *"Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground."* Because of this, Christians had courage to study the natural world.

"Science rests on uniquely Christian ideas, and it can't work without them."

People need correction. Many in the East see humans as divine, and believe that enlightenment comes by mystical experience. Islam rejects the idea Jesus taught, that humans are born with a tendency towards error and sin. But it turns out that the Christian doctrine of *original sin*, despised by so many, was foundational to the scientific method. Because we're fallen, early Christian scientists insisted, our findings are in constant need of objectivity, facts, peer review, and sceptical testing.

H.G. Wells said, "I am an historian, I am not a believer, but I must confess as a historian that this penniless preacher from Nazareth is irrevocably the very centre of history. Jesus Christ is easily the most dominant figure in all history".

Jesus is not just a figure from history, interesting though He is. This is someone you and I can know, as John said at the close of his Gospel, *Joh 20:30 And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: Joh 20:31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and* ***that believing ye might have life through his name*****.**

If we do not get that life, whatever we learned was for nothing. It is possible to have that life and we shall explore this on our journey of the Golden thread, DV.

2. The Bible

Preparatory reading: Genesis Chapter 1 and John Chapter 1.

I was given a Gideon's Bible, a New Testament, by the good people of that organisation, the Gideon's International, in the year 1958 at my school. It was a kindly idea, and in the opening pages of the New Testament they gave to me, it told of a boy John Nicholson and how he read his Bible and how he was led to encourage other to do the same. In the autumn of the year 1898, John H. Nicholson of Janesville, Wisconsin, came to the Central Hotel at Boscobel, Wisconsin, for the night. The hotel being crowded, it was suggested that he take a bed in a double room with Samuel E. Hill of Beloit, Wisconsin. The two men soon discovered that both were Christians, and that John Nicholson, as a 12-year-old boy, had promised his dying mother that he would read God's Word and pray daily. It had been his custom for many years to read the Bible before retiring for the night. They had their evening devotions together, and on their knees before God the thoughts were given which later developed into an association known as Gideon's International.

Now that well meaning gift of a New Testament, told me absolutely nothing about my state before God Almighty. It gave me a lot of helpful scriptures, at least they would have been helpful if I was believer, but I was not. The book they gave me had the purpose of enhancing my life with God's Wisdom, but it did not seem to be aimed at completely transforming my life into something new. It did not say to me, "you are a sinner and only Christ can help you", for it seemed like a self-help manual, to improve what I was, not change what I was. It would make me into a better hypocrite but it would not save me and make me Christ like.

To be fair to Gideon's, it did speak of Christ in the text but to me He was lost in the "things" which I could do or should do and the helps, which were all disjointed, so I didn't know what was a priority and I certainly did not approach it as a believer, just an unbeliever trying to be good. I had no idea what Christianity was, except "being good", absolutely no idea of personal salvation and how to get it, and no idea where to start.

Having just completed a study on Luke's Gospel, and seen what awful hypocrisy burns in the hearts of all men, including the disciples, I felt a deep pang of sympathy for all the lost. How could I help them when I struggled myself? The Pharisee is in each of us and he needs putting to death so that the New Man can take his place, but this involves the input from Jesus. Learning the Bible is not about being cleverer than other people, being better at arguing what you believe, being more knowledgeable and so superior to the unlearned. It is about finding Jesus and forever after following Him.

I write this in the hope that it might bring the Bible into better focus and that we might see Jesus as the Golden Thread that links the entire Bible together. I hope

that I can give a general picture of Scripture rather than getting too focused on the minutiae. All these self help books are written like a “how to do Christianity properly” manual, and they are often a pompous guide by a well meaning soul, and I should hate to fall in that category. I am just telling you about my progress in Christianity and I can certainly say with Paul, *Php 3:12 I do not claim that I have already succeeded or have already become perfect. I keep striving to win the prize for which Christ Jesus has already won me to himself. Php 3:13 Of course, my friends, I really do not think that I have already won it; the one thing I do, however, is to forget what is behind me and do my best to reach what is ahead. Php 3:14 So I run straight toward the goal in order to win the prize, which is God's call through Christ Jesus to the life above*.

Looking back over my life, I realise that I did not have a good overview of the Bible, and that I chased individual doctrines down “rabbit holes”, which stimulated my intellect but did not put any real order in what I studied. To my shame, I did not study fully the Old Testament, and that became a guide to the “old ways” instead of an explanation of the new ways, and above all I never saw Jesus much at all in what I read. The concept that the Lord Jesus is in fact Jehovah of the Old Testament was truly groundbreaking for me, but more of that subject later.

My advice on Christianity and finding Jesus, is to trust no man, no, not even me. It matters not if they are a trusted member of your family, Christian community or the closest friend that you have, it’s up to you to find Jesus and not to find Him through another’s eyes, even mine. You do not have to be rushed into joining a group of people, and those who rush you are often hiding something which is only introduced later and they are getting you to follow a man’s way. Your goal should be to find Jesus and then to follow Him, *Joh 10:27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and* ***they follow me****.* I cannot stress this enough, if people are urging you to “join them” rather than “follow Jesus”, you had better be careful.

And what version of the Bible do you use? I suggest that you use all translations until you get some knowledge of the Geek and Hebrew, then you can have a preferred Bible. Do not fall into the trap of having one version, which you are told fell from heaven without and errors, and that this is the definitive version. You have to decide for yourself. E-sword is an excellent Bible tool, https://www.e-sword.net/downloads.html

One thing we need to get, is a clear perspective of the work of Jesus, not just Jesus in the Gospels, but Jesus in the Bible, Jesus in the Old Testament, Jesus who declares Himself to be the sum and substance of Scripture, the Bible. Yes, the Bible is a book about Jesus from the beginning to the end.

I was moved to begin this study because of our Lord's words in Luke's Gospel, *Luk 24:27 And **beginning at Moses and all the prophets**, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.* **AND** *Luk 24:44 And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled**, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms**, concerning me*.

It seems to me that we pass over this subject far too quickly and are far more interested in the books of the New Testament such as Romans, Ephesians, Galatians and so on, from which we can satisfy our intellectual curiosity for doctrine without having to face up to the Christ before whom we shall all appear. For a start, "Books from the New Testament are more commonly cited than books from the Old Testament across every Christian group. At least one book from the New Testament is named in 90% of all sermons, while a book of the Old Testament is cited in 61% of sermons". "Many churches lean heavily into sermons on New Testament books and rarely preach out of the Old Testament. Consequently, many believers don't read or study the Old Testament because they don't think it's relevant today". Sermons of the New Testament are more popular than sermons of the Old Testament. The Old Testament has fallen into neglect. It is as if Jesus does not speak through the older testament.

But I must first define the Old Testament, and it is not what most people think it is, namely **the Law, the Prophets and the writings**, called by the acronym TNK, or in Hebrew Bible or **Tanakh**, which has three parts to it, the Torah, Law, the Nevi'im, Prophets and the Ketuvim, the writings. When Jesus said we could find Him in the "*the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms"*, that was all of the Scripture that existed at the time when He spoke. The Gospels and the New Testament had not been written yet. The Old Testament was expanded by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John to include the Gospels. So we might now say that the Old Testament consisted of the Law, the Prophets, the Writings **and the Gospels**.

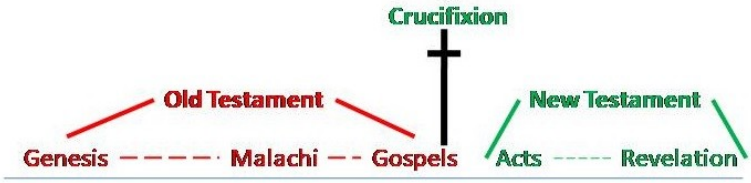
The Gospels are for the most part Old Testament writings, from the birth of Christ under Judaism, in the Old Testament, until His death on the Cross which put an end to the Old Testament period and ushered in the New Testament. All that He did and said was done under the first covenant, or Old Testament. He did not come to destroy the Law but He did come to destroy the lawyers, the Pharisees and the hypocrisy that went with the teachings of laws given by those men. He taught the law in its purest form, not with the outward obedience of a hard heart, but as it should be taught, with the love to God and man, from a heart softened by God. Jesus spent most of His short life in the Old Testament times, albeit the end of that Old Covenant, but He spent it as a Jew obeying the Law until He said, "it is finished", and that was the signal for the New Covenant made with His Blood. This is a most important thing to bear in mind when

reading the Gospels, for you will see that Jesus is teaching under the Old Testament and that makes sense of what He is saying.

The people who have edited our Bible have done us a great disservice, because they have divided it with a page that is inserted between Malachi and Matthew upon which is written, "**The New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ**". The page is not in the correct place and it should go forward nearer to The Acts of the Apostles than the book of Malachi. The result of putting it where they do is to cause thousands of people who read the Gospels, to think that they are New Testament writings and with that, it firmly puts it in their mind to interpret events that occur in the Gospels, in the light of the New Testament.

For example, tithing does occur in the Gospels, *Luk 11:42 But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone*. That says, in the Gospel of Luke, that you should tithe, "*these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone"*. The Pharisee only did part of tithing but left out doing the law, so if you take the Gospels are telling you to tithe, why on earth do you tell the believers you don't have to comply with the ceremonial law, *Col 2:16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:*

The Christian is immediately confused as to why he should do tithing instead of Christian giving, and do the law, yet not do the law. He gets confused that there are mixed messages coming out of the Bible. But it is no mixed message, because what occurs in Jesus ministry is occurring under the Law of Moses, not under the New Covenant. The Gospels occur in the period of the Old Testament law, not in the Christian era. The four Gospels are not happening in the New Testament, but in the Old Testament. The Gospels for the most part, up to the crucifixion are Old Testament, they happen in the Old Testament times.



This is a key point when assessing the relevance of a particular teaching. Where does the teaching occur in the timeline of the books? Does it occur in say, Genesis, or Psalms, or before the destruction of the first Temple, or in the time of the early disciples, or in the times of the later disciples, Acts, Romans etc? The time when it occurs could be of great significance and simply saying "New Testament times" may be wrong especially if you are referring to the Gospels.

Jesus is the Messiah who came under the Law, and He was The Prophet foretold in Deuteronomy, the second law giving, He was the King of the Jews, He was the Great High Priest of the law and this all occurred in the Old Testament times. Why then would the Jews look for the Messiah in the Christian era, in the New Testament, if He had already come for them in the Old Testament period? Those calling themselves Jews would have to certainly twist the scriptures, nay even invent some, to read this into the Scriptures, but as we shall see it is a great lie perpetrated by satan to make the Messiah ineffective.

The Jews and Gentiles both rejected Jesus at His death, they all crucified Him and the experiment with the "chosen people", the earthly nation of Israel, was finished and it lay in ruins, being no different than the gentile nations. Stephen observes that, *Act 7:51You stubborn and hardheaded people! You are always fighting against the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors did. Act 7:52 Is there one prophet that your ancestors didn't mistreat? They killed the prophets who told about the coming of the One Who Obeys God. And now you have turned against him and killed him. Act 7:53 Angels gave you God's Law, but you still don't obey it.* CEV.

The Jews did not obey God, but from the way certain writers look at them, it was only a blip in their great history, for example https://www.**gotquestions**.org/times-of-the-Gentiles.html says,

> One theme of Romans 11 is that, when the Jewish people rejected Christ, they were temporarily cut off from the blessings of a relationship with God. As a result, **the gospel was given to the Gentiles, and they gladly received it. This partial hardening of heart for Israel doesn't preclude individual Jews from being saved, but it prevents the nation from accepting Christ as Messiah until His plans are finished**. When the time is right, God will restore the entire nation, and they will come to faith in Him once again, ending "the times of the Gentiles".

You would think that for all that had passed, Stephens speech counted for nothing and this "partial hardening" while the Nations are saved is but a parenthesis, until they too are saved. But the "partial hardening" or partial blindness does not mean that every Jew has partial sight of the Gospel, but that some of the Jews have seen the truth of Christ and some have not.

What Paul is being made to say is, the Jewish people were cut off from Christ and the Nations only were saved, and the Jews were not saved until the end of the "time of the Gentiles". This is ridiculous. Jews were a large portion of the early church along with Gentiles, the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem saw 3,000 Jews saved, *Act 2:40 And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Act 2:41 Then they that gladly*

received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them ***about three thousand souls***. The Gentiles never came into the equation until long after Paul was saved on the Damascus road (some fourteen years).

Paul also says that Jew and Gentile are one in Spirit, *Gal 3:28 There is* ***neither Jew nor Greek****, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. Gal 3:29* ***And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise***. So why does Paul create a division again into the two, especially when he is having a go at Peter's dissembling with the Jews. I will look at this later on.

Also, Paul says that, "*And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise".* What, me, a child of Abraham, by my belief in Christ? Yes, that right, a Jew was not who you thought, it is one who is made so by the inward nature of the heart, *Rom 2:28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: Rom 2:29 But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God*. This must mean that what counts for something with God is that you have your heart circumcised in Christ. But I am getting ahead of myself.

Throughout the generations of Israel, they had continually resisted God, and so what was the point of religion, and particularly when you get to the Cross and find not only did Jews and the world desert Jesus but His disciples did as well? No one it seems, wanted Jesus, and nobody wanted Christianity. That magnifies the love of God to sinners.

Now we have used Jesus' own words when He said, *Mat 5:17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. Mat 5:18 For verily I say unto you,* ***Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled****……..Luk 24:44 And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled,* ***which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me***.

What is the Law of Moses? The Law of Moses also called the Mosaic Law is the law revealed to Moses by God but much more than law. The term primarily refers to the Torah or the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy and Numbers, sometimes called the 'Pentateuch', πεντάτευχος, Penta meaning "five", and teuchos, τεῦχος, meaning a vessel, or a container for scrolls.

When I became a Christian I did not register that Jesus had said that Moses wrote about Him. I did not know that Jesus was portrayed in all the writings of Moses. I had not been paying attention*, Luk 24:44 Jesus said to them, "While I was still*

with you, I told you that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Books of the Prophets, and in the Psalms had to happen." CEV.

It is important that the older stories, written from the time of Genesis, are read first and read with the Gospels, because the Gospels can only be fully understood in the light of the Old Testament. Jesus quoted the Old Testament 78 times, the Pentateuch alone 26 times. He quoted from Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Amos, Jonah, Micah, and Malachi. He referred to the Old Testament as "The Scriptures," "the word of God," and "the wisdom of God." The apostles quoted 209 times from the Old Testament and considered it "the oracles of God." The Old Testament in hundreds of places predicted the events of the New Testament and as the New Testament is the fulfilment of, and testifies to the genuineness and authenticity of the Old Testament, both Testaments must be considered together as the Word of God.

3. What is a Christian?

Preparatory reading: 1 Peter Chapter 4, Ephesians Chapter 4.

I spoke briefly about the Bible and the position of the Gospels in regard to the Old Testament, and how the Scripture speaks of Jesus. Now I want to look at the followers of Jesus and what makes a Christian? It is necessary that we define the term "Christian" at the outset, because I do not want you to have any doubts or illusions at all over what it means. You no doubt may have your ideas as to what a Christian is but where do you get that belief from.

Christian is a transliteration of the Greek Χριστιανός = Christianos. The word is used three times in the New Testament,

1. *Act 11:26 And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And* ***the disciples were called Christians*** *first in Antioch.*
2. *Act 26:28 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou* ***persuadest me to be a Christian****.*
3. *1Pe 4:16 Yet if any man* ***suffer as a Christian****, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.*

Discipleship is a necessary prerequisite to becoming a Christian and Jesus tells us what is necessary by a parable, *Luk 14:25 And great crowds went with him; and, turning round, he said to them, Luk 14:26* ***If any man come to me, and shall not hate his own father and mother, and wife, and children, and brothers, and sisters, yea, and his own life too, he cannot be my***

disciple; Luk 14:27 and whoever does not carry his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple*. Luk 14:28 For which of you, desirous of building a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, if he have what is needed to complete it; Luk 14:29 in order that, having laid the foundation of it, and not being able to finish it, all who see it do not begin to mock at him, Luk 14:30 saying, This man began to build and was not able to finish? Luk 14:31 Or what king, going on his way to engage in war with another king, does not, sitting down first, take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him coming against him with twenty thousand? Luk 14:32 and if not, while he is yet far off, having sent an embassy, he asks for terms of peace. Luk 14:33 Thus then every one of you who forsakes not all that is his own cannot be my disciple*. Darby.

You may take a general view that it is anyone and everyone that is christened as a baby and was made a member of a church assembly is a Christian in virtue of that ordinance. It is alright, you may think to hold that view, except that Jesus did not make christening an essential part of His faith, and it does not make you a Christian, so you cannot hold on to that thread. Being christened does nothing to make you Christ like, and some of the worst people in the history of the world have been christened.

You may think that by linking to a denomination, say the Baptists that you become a Christian, or by converting to Roman Catholicism because it feels more religious, you become a Christian. There may be Christians in the denominations, but they did not become Christians by joining with that denomination. There is not one denomination that is supreme when it comes to Christianity; in fact Christianity knows nothing of any denominations. They are the inventions of men that will guide you away from Jesus.

Christianity is a way of life marked out by Christ, by doing what He said we should do, "*Thus then every one of you who forsakes not all that is his own cannot be my disciple*". That puts the obligation right back to us. If Jesus forgives my sins, I am Jesus' bondman thence forth to serve the Master, ***Mat 23:8*** *But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. Mat 23:9 And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Mat 23:10 Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ*.

Christianity does not end with you being forgiven, that is only the beginning. I would love to tell you that I think that the Christian life is one of total peace, where you can expect a long life in safety, where no harm will come to you and then your passing will be in painlessness and peace, but I cannot, and that would be a lie. The Christian life leads on to a better world, but while you are here, you are involved in a life and death struggle, that is, if you really are a Christian.

For many, being a Christian is about going to church once a week and forgetting what it is about for the rest of the week. Church attendance, rather than establishing Christians, serves to highlight why they are not Christians. They slide in and slide out of the meetings, not knowing half the people they meet with, and most probably do not want to know the people they meet with and an hour and a half is perhaps all they can take of it. Would you call these people that go to church “Christians” if you did not know who they were? What would possibly give you the idea that they were Christians?

What is “Christ like” about the people who call themselves Christians? Well you have to know what Christ is like, before you can answer that. When someone is your hero, when someone is admired by you, when you like someone so much and you say, “if only I could be like Him”, you imitate the traits and habits of that person and you begin to sound like them. This is what Christianity is like and you have to want it so much that you really make an effort to become like Jesus, as the Apostle Paul did, *Php 3:8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, Php 3:9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: Php 3:10* ***That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;*** *Php 3:11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead*.

The Christian does not take Salvation from Jesus without giving back to Jesus everything. He doesn’t take it for granted that he is saved by some word of a fallible man, but he seeks assurance from Jesus Himself. Have you sought the words from Jesus or aren’t you bothered. These words of Jesus are reassuringly warming to the soul, *Joh 6:37 All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and* ***him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*** *Joh 6:38 For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. Joh 6:39 And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. Joh 6:40 And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day*.

The sweetest sound to the labouring soul, is Jesus’ cry, *Mat 11:27 All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him. Mat 11:28 Come* ***unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*** *Mat 11:29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. Mat 11:30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

To the listening ear He beckons you to eternal life, *Joh 5:24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, **He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life**, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life..... Joh 11:25 Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: Joh 11:26 And whosoever **liveth and believeth in me shall never die**. Believest thou this?* To have this assurance is not simply to be a disciple, since Jesus had disciples and they did not believe in Him during His life on earth. You must be a part of Him, IN Him, and that is true fellowship, *1Jn 5:18 We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not. 1Jn 5:19 And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. 1Jn 5:20 And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and **we are in him that is true**, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life*.

The Christian has changed his allegiance from satan to Jesus, which will lead to a deliberate change in behaviour, *Gal 5:19 Now **the works of the flesh** are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Gal 5:20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Gal 5:21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Gal 5:22 But **the fruit of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Gal 5:23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. Gal 5:24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. Gal 5:25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit*.

The Christian is ever conscious of the difference that Jesus has made to his life and now he fights against those things which he once loved. The works of the Flesh are contrast with the Fruit of the Spirit. The earthly, sinful nature is contrast with the spiritual nature of the child of God. How does this change show itself? The Holy Spirit offers empowerment, guidance, strength, and wisdom to change within us through transforming our hearts, *Eph 4:17 In the Lord's name, then, I warn you: do not continue to live like the heathen, whose thoughts are worthless Eph 4:18 and whose minds are in the dark. They have no part in the life that God gives, for they are completely ignorant and stubborn. Eph 4:19 They have lost all feeling of shame; they give themselves over to vice and do all sorts of indecent things without restraint. Eph 4:20 That was not what you learned about Christ! Eph 4:21 You certainly heard about him, and as his followers you were taught the truth that is in Jesus. Eph 4:22 **So get rid of your old self, which made you live as you used to—the old self that was being destroyed by its deceitful desires**. Eph 4:23 Your hearts and minds must be made completely new, Eph 4:24 and you must put on the new self, which is*

created in God's likeness and reveals itself in the true life that is upright and holy. Eph 4:25 No more lying, then! Each of you must tell the truth to the other believer, because we are all members together in the body of Christ. Eph 4:26 If you become angry, do not let your anger lead you into sin, and do not stay angry all day. Eph 4:27 Don't give the Devil a chance. Eph 4:28 If you used to rob, you must stop robbing and start working, in order to earn an honest living for yourself and to be able to help the poor. Eph 4:29 Do not use harmful words, but only helpful words, the kind that build up and provide what is needed, so that what you say will do good to those who hear you. Eph 4:30 And do not make God's Holy Spirit sad; for the Spirit is God's mark of ownership on you, a guarantee that the Day will come when God will set you free. Eph 4:31 Get rid of all bitterness, passion, and anger. No more shouting or insults, no more hateful feelings of any sort. Eph 4:32 Instead, be kind and tender-hearted to one another, and forgive one another, as God has forgiven you through Christ. GNB.

The old self, the old man is dead, *Rom 6:6 Knowing this, that our **old man is crucified** with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. Rom 6:7 For he that is dead is freed from sin.....Col 3:9 Lie not one to another, seeing that **ye have put off the old man** with his deeds; Col 3:10 And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him*:

But that is not all there is about the Christian, it is not just about the "in working" of Christian virtues, there is also the "outworking" of the Christian nature and purpose. This puts us on the same collision course with the world that Jesus found Himself on, *1Pe 4:12 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: 1Pe 4:**13 But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. 1Pe 4:14 If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you**: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. 1Pe 4:15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. 1Pe 4:16 Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. 1Pe 4:17 For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? 1Pe 4:18 And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? 1Pe 4:19 Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.*

Are you prepared to die for Jesus? He died for you, and that is what you may be called on to do in His service.

We are to encourage one another in this, *Php 1:28 Be brave when you face your enemies. Your courage will show them that they are going to be destroyed, and it will show you that you will be saved. God will make all of this happen, Php 1:29 and he has blessed you. Not only do you have faith in Christ, but you suffer for him. Php 1:30 You saw me suffer, and you still hear about my troubles. Now you must suffer in the same way. CEV.*

I would not have you think that I have achieved the high ideals that I talk about. Sometimes I feel a real hypocrite but I really strive after Jesus, and there is nothing more that I want than to be like Him, but I fail miserably, and at times I feel like a traitor to the cause. I can say with Paul, *Rom 7:19 For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Rom 7:20 Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. Rom 7:21 I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.* But I am not going to let the devil make me give up and so I am more and more on my guard to avoid the snares of this world.

Christianity is not easy but it is certainly worth all that it brings. I started with little guidance and a very poor example from the Christians in this generation and am still correcting the errors. I hope that the readers will be helped to make fewer mistakes than I did. I think it is really important that we sort out what a Christian is and does before we launch our boat on the sea of religion.

It is my hope that we all reach His goal, *Col 1:27 To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: Col 1:28 Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom****; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus***:

4. The Bible the Handbook of the Faith

Preparatory reading: Romans Chapter 10 and 2 Timothy verses 1 to 8.

One of the things that really impacted me when I became a Christian was that the Bible ceased to be a dead, hard to read, a stuffy, meaningless volume. It was as if it had been hiding itself and its treasure from me, and then in my conversion, I had not only been given life, I had been given the password to the Book, and it opened to me in a totally different way. Strange as it may sound, it spoke to me and my condition, it spoke from the same pages that once contained obscure things, life to me, and I remember thinking, it’s talking to me personally.

The Bible is no ordinary book, it is the written record of the Christian faith, and it is the handbook of the Faith. That is a big statement to make, but if you have come to Jesus for your salvation, you came through the door of that book, or else you came to another Jesus. The Bible is variously known as the Scripture, the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures, the Law of the Lord, the living promises, the Lively (living) Oracles (words), the Message of Christ, the Oracles of God, the Scripture of Truth, the Sword of the Spirit, the Truth, the Word of Christ, the Word of Life, the Words of the Lord and much more. It is a special book.

Why is the Bible different from other religious books, like the Quran, the book of Mormon, and secular books, like Shakespeare or a Biology book? You will find that the Quran is partially like the Bible but also differs in part from it, the book of Mormon is in part a direct copy of the KJV, which should please some die hard supporters of the KJV. Shakespeare makes no attempt to reveal the Creator God and the Biology text book is an attempt to classify a part of the Created world. The Bible claims to be a Revelation of Jesus, and claims to be how God wants His creatures to behave.

When a Christian opens the Bible, he is confronted with a number of claims about the world that he lives in, about how it came into being, how it is governed, how an unseen world influences the world we live in, how the world will end, and a final judgement of mankind. Interspersed in its pages are a history of the world, sacred songs, divine laws, prophecy and a life story of Jesus who makes certain claims on us. We might be tempted in standing the Bible alongside other books to confirm or deny its accuracy. The Jews had a set of books that they claimed, explained the laws of Moses in more detail, and they rank these alongside of the Bible. Some “churches” have books which they put on equality with the Bible.

Where do you stand on this matter, is the Bible the arbiter of truth or are other books necessary to explain it and indeed equal to it? Do we believe that Jesus was a miracle worker for instance? Let us take the example of when He came across a dead man in Nain, which only occurs in the Bible, *Luk 7:11 And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. Luk 7:12 Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. Luk 7:13 And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. Luk 7:14 And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. Luk 7:15* ***And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother***.

A definition of a miracle is, “an extraordinary and welcome event that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws and is therefore attributed to a divine

agency”. A mobile phone would have been a “miracle” a hundred years ago by that definition. But Jesus does something that nobody else can do in giving the man a second chance at life, and we are left to think about the truth of what we have just read. Can I accept that story as a fact as it does not occur elsewhere in any other book? Some people reject it as a part of the mythology of Jesus, but on what grounds?

Jesus had a strange conception, very different from ours according to the Bible, and the Bible claims that it was God’s baby, *Mat 1:18 This is how Jesus Christ was born. A young woman named Mary was engaged to Joseph from King David's family. But before they were married, she learned that she was going to have a baby by God's Holy Spirit. Mat 1:19 Joseph was a good man and did not want to embarrass Mary in front of everyone. So he decided to quietly call off the wedding. Mat 1:20 While Joseph was thinking about this, an angel from the Lord came to him in a dream. The angel said, "Joseph, the baby that Mary will have is from the Holy Spirit. Go ahead and marry her. Mat 1:21 Then after her baby is born, name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.*" CEV.

What can we say of this? Leaving aside for the moment, God and angels, parthenogenesis, virgin birth, can and does occur in humans, though it does not produce viable offspring, but some creatures do. This story introduces a being called Gabriel, a messenger of God, who conveys to Mary the strange news that she will bear the son of God. It is a supernatural story, in which Mary will have a Divine birth, not strictly a virgin birth, parthenogenesis, because it does not involve insemination by a man but by God.

Whether you believe it or not, it is essential to the story of Jesus, Mary giving birth to a child who is not of Adam’s paternity and as a result is sinless. This sinless man will offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, and by this, usher men who believe in Jesus, into a whole new life. This story of redemption is unique to the Bible.

The Bible tells us of our origins in the book of Genesis, and gives us more detail in John’s Gospel, *Joh 1:3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made*. We are told that this Jesus is in fact the Creator of all things. I can see that the more that I introduce these stories from the Bible, the more people are turning their heads away from the Book, as it sounds too fantastic.

People might believe in a historical Jesus, but not in a supernatural Jesus. They might believe that He somehow came from God, but not that He was God. They might believe that He did miracles but not that He was the Creator. You see, people pick and choose what they believe, and they do not let the book speak for itself, they always have to contradict it at some point, and put their own spin on things.

The Bible will in consequence be seen as a good book full of moral principles and little else. It will be seen as an out of date science book because we think we know more now than those ancient men. In fact we would say that Jesus is mistaken for retelling the tale of Jonah being swallowed by a large fish, we would say that Jesus was wrong to believe that Noah's world had a global flood and we would congratulate ourselves on showing what a primitive belief Jesus had. We certainly would not believe that He was the Creator, which would be too big a task for Him, although we might grudgingly give Him credit for a few miracles.

We would say that He wasn't really dead at His crucifixion and His body was taken away until He recovered. All of the supranature is slowly erased from the pages of the Bible until a husk of morality is all that is left and deadness permeates its lifeless pages. The story of a man called Adam becomes a race of monkeys, one of who is chosen to be the Homo Divinus, and we are satisfied that we have cracked the origins debate and reconciled Christianity with Science. This is what John Stott supposedly a Christian said,

> *It seems perfectly possible to reconcile the historicity of Adam with at least some (theistic) evolutionary theory. Many biblical Christians in fact do so, believing them to be not entirely incompatible. To assert the historicity of an original pair who sinned through disobedience is one thing; it is quite another to deny all evolution and assert the separate and special creation of everything, including both subhuman creatures and Adam's body. The suggestion (for it is no more than this) does not seem to me to be against Scripture and therefore impossible that when God made man in His own image, what He did was to stamp His own likeness on one of the many "hominoids" which appear to have been living at the time.'*

Can Stott have really been a Christian when he denies the Biblical origin of sin? The Bible is the essence of the faith as this conversation between Charles Templeton, an evangelist who defected from the faith, and Billy Graham shows.

> "All our differences came to a head in a discussion which, better than anything I know, explains Billy Graham and his phenomenal success as an evangelist. In the course of our conversation I said, 'But, Billy, it's simply not possible any longer to believe, for instance, the biblical account of creation. The world was not created over a period of days a few thousand years ago; it has evolved over millions of years. It's not a matter of speculation; it's a demonstrable fact.'
>
> 'I don't accept that' Billy said. 'And there are reputable scholars who don't.' 'Who are these scholars?' I said. 'Men in conservative Christian colleges [?]'

> ‘Most of them, yes,’ he said. ‘But that is not the point. I believe the Genesis account of creation **because it’s in the Bible**. I’ve discovered something in my ministry: When I take the Bible literally, when I proclaim it as the word of God, my preaching has power. When I stand on the platform and say, ‘God says,’ or ‘The Bible says,’ the Holy Spirit uses me. There are results. Wiser men than you or I have been arguing questions like this for centuries. I don’t have the time or the intellect to examine all sides of the theological dispute, so I’ve decided once for all to stop questioning and accept the Bible as God’s word.’
>
> ‘But Billy,’ I protested, ‘You cannot do that. You don’t dare stop thinking about the most important question in life. Do it and you begin to die. It’s intellectual suicide.'” ‘I don’t know about anybody else,’ he said, ‘but I’ve decided that that’s the path for me.'”

That is the path for me also. The moment you question the veracity of the Bible, you destroy the structure that will give you life, *Rom 1:28 People did not think it was important to have a true knowledge of God. So God left them and allowed them to have their own worthless thinking. And so they do what they should not do*. ERV.

As Michael Patton said of the encounter, “As I said, I don’t know if Graham’s words are the words he actually said, but I have no reason to doubt that they are. You see, there does come a time in our life when we “decide” to believe. It is not as if our intellect is no longer in the game, it is simply that there is a sufficient amount of evidence to make a commitment. Graham had enough. He is right, there is no way faith can wait until *every* stone is overturned. None of us will ever get to a place where our intellect has no objections whatsoever. This is the modernistic ideal of indubitability, which is impossible in *any* area of life. At some point in our journey, we decide that God is real, the Bible is trustworthy, and Christ is who he said he was.”

Lee Strobel did an interview with Charles Templeton when he was much older and had time to reflect upon his decision. I include it because it questions whether he felt he made the right decision,

> . . . Everything good I know, everything decent I know, everything pure I know, I learned from Jesus. Yes . . . yes. And tough! Just look at Jesus. He castigated people. He was angry. People don’t think of him that way, but they don’t read the Bible. He had a righteous anger. He cared for the oppressed and exploited. There’s no question that he had the highest moral standard, the least duplicity, the greatest compassion, of any human being in history. There have been many other wonderful people, but Jesus is Jesus….’

> “Uh . . . but . . . no,’ he said slowly, ‘he’s the most . . .” He stopped, then started again. “In my view,” he declared, “he is the most important human being who has ever existed.”
>
> That’s when Templeton uttered the words I never expected to hear from him. “And if I may put it this way,” he said as his voice began to crack, ‘I . . . miss . . . him!”
>
> With that tears flooded his eyes. He turned his head and looked downward, raising his left hand to shield his face from me. His shoulders bobbed as he wept. . . .
> Templeton fought to compose himself. I could tell it wasn’t like him to lose control in front of a stranger. He sighed deeply and wiped away a tear. After a few more awkward moments, he waved his hand dismissively. Finally, quietly but adamantly, he insisted: “Enough of that.”

One thing we ants, we intellectual morons, neglect in the presence of The Almighty Creator, is that true knowledge and information come from God alone, *Exo 31:2 See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: Exo 31:3 And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, Exo 31:4 To devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass*. We do not see that He is the source of our wisdom, 1Ti *1:17 Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory forever and ever.* Amen.

Human wisdom is corrupt by virtue of sin but man refuses to accept this as a fact, *1Co 1:18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. 1Co 1:19 For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. 1Co 1:20 Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 1Co 1:21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe*.

One of the important things to note is that mankind can be led away into errors by his sin. He is fallible by nature, prone to being led astray by what he wants to hear, and can be blind to what is in front of his face. Science has become very much opinion rather than truth because of sin.

I could go on more about the truth of the Bible, but I will draw this lesson to a close. When you read the Bible, you do not need the words of sinful men and unbelievers to help you. I would suggest that before you go to commentaries and

interpretations of Scripture, that you read the Bible for yourself, uninterrupted. Pray to the One who inspired it that He will make plain to you His Word. Never leave His side and always question everything, *1Th 5:21 Prove all things; hold fast that which is good*.

Where you are told by men to believe something, ask for Scriptural proof of what they say, then go away and examine it before accepting it. Always use a number of different Bible texts to get the sense of what is said, and if you can, look it up in the original languages. There is an urgency to find the truth but no urgency to accept what a man teaches you without proof. Remember, you follow the Master, Jesus, and no one else. He alone holds the worlds together and your faith. Man is just a bruised reed in comparison, and if a matter is not of Jesus it is of no consequence. *Col 1:17 He exists before everything, and in Him all holds together. TLV.*

This book engenders faith, not just any faith, but faith in Jesus, *Rom 10:17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and* ***hearing by the word of God****.* That is its principle aim. Read it all you like, but that reading of it will be of little use if you do not find Jesus as your perfect Saviour and Lord of your life.

5. The Hard Heart

Preparatory reading: Matthew Chapter 19.

The “heart” in the Old Testament is equated with the conscience, *1Sa 24:4 And David's men said to him, Behold the day of which Jehovah said to thee, Behold, I will give thine enemy into thy hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good to thee. And David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe secretly. 1Sa 24:5* ***And it came to pass afterwards that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt****. 1Sa 24:6 And he said to his men, Jehovah forbid that I should do this thing to my master, Jehovah's anointed, to stretch forth my hand against him, for he is the anointed of Jehovah.* Darby. David felt pangs of guilt that he had cut Saul’s skirt off and confessed, “*Jehovah forbid that I should do this thing to my master”*. We would say today, that David had a “pang of conscience”.

Sihon king of Heshbon had an obdurate heart in not letting the people pass by, *Deu 2:30 But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him: for the LORD thy God hardened his spirit, and* ***made his heart obstinate****, that he might deliver him into thy hand, as appeareth this day*. He had no conscience about blocking the path of the Israelites, and a total lack of sympathy for the people of God.

There is something within us that can direct us to feel remorse for our actions, or something that can make us lacking in sympathetic understanding and not open to kindness. We call this unsympathetic feeling a hard heart, as opposed to the pliable heart, and this condition is not commended by Jesus, *Mar 16:14 Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen*. Yes, even we disciples can have a hard heart of unbelief and the reason we have this is, as we shall see, is because we live too much in the law of the older testament, instead of in the Spirit of Jesus and the New Testament.

The New Testament is against the hard heart, but so is the Old Testament, particularly Jesus. Yes, Jesus is in the last days of the Old Covenant, and He speaks against the hardness of men's hearts, *Mar 10:3 And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you? Mar 10:4 And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away. Mar 10:5 And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept*. The Israelites had hard hearts and it was necessary to make allowance for this under the Law, but it was due to the changed nature of man, *Mar 10:6 But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. Mar 10:7 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife.*

If it was wrong to divorce your wife for almost every reason, why on earth didn't the Lord say so plainly, why let a man continue in a sin? *Mat 19:7 The Pharisees asked him, "Why, then, did Moses give the law for a man to hand his wife a divorce notice and send her away?" Mat 19:8 Jesus answered, "Moses gave you permission to divorce your wives because you are so hard to teach. But it was not like that at the time of creation. Mat 19:9 I tell you, then, that any man who divorces his wife for any cause other than her unfaithfulness, commits adultery if he marries some other woman.*" GNB.

The Lord is not like us self-righteous fakes, who think that because we have uttered a profession of faith, we can go after our fellow sinners, and escape retribution. No, we are sinners saved and we are all sinners while we are in this world. We should ask, *Jer 8:22 Is there no balm in Gilead*, is there no way we can escape the punishment of our sins? There is and under the Old Testament, there were some things the contrite heart could do, *Lev 4:2 Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a soul shall sin through ignorance against any of the commandments of the LORD concerning things which ought not to be done, and shall do against any of them: Lev 4:3 If the priest that is anointed do sin according to the sin of the people; then let him bring for his sin, which he hath sinned, a young bullock without blemish unto the LORD for a sin offering. Lev 4:4 And he shall bring the bullock unto the door of the tabernacle of the*

congregation before the LORD; and shall lay his hand upon the bullock's head, and kill the bullock before the LORD.

The offerings were set out and the sacrifice to God was according to the sin. Is hardness of heart a sin? Yes it is, and Jesus was hurt at the disciples' hardness of heart, we should be too, *Mar 16:14 Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.* The disciples were not behaving in faith, therefore it was sin, *Rom 14:22 Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. Rom 14:23 And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*

Is hardness of heart a sin that cannot be atoned for? No, like any sin it can be forgiven, except blasphemy, *Mat 12:31 Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. Mat 12:32 And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.....1Jn 5:16 If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it*.

We can forgive a hard heart when it is doing those sins that are called to mind, "*If a soul shall sin through ignorance against any of the commandments of the LORD concerning things which ought not to be done",* he shall seek forgiveness and he shall receive forgiveness.

Many actions that a man does are spawned out of a hard heart. By way of Scriptural illustration let us look at this, *Deu 21:18 If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them: Deu 21:19 Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place; Deu 21:20 And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard. Deu 21:21 And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear*.

It was not the hard heart of the parents who did wrong, they would have done anything for their dear boy, a rebel none the less. The parents were brought before the congregation of the city, and had to confess the son's sin, the stubborn and rebellious nature, and then they watched as he was stoned to death. I think that the hard heart was in the men of that city, who were vengeful and swift to act. It did at least stop those people going after the parents.

Children seemed to undergo a degree of violence which some parents consider a necessary part of their growing up, *Pro 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it*, and, *Pro 29:15 The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame*. So that is all you can think of by way of discipline? I remember how harsh we were in disciplining our young ones, while at the same time teaching them to become little hypocrites. I remember one day thinking, why don't we beat our wives for their misdemeanours, and give them the right to beat us. And it seemed totally at odds to hold such a division in the way we treated children and adults.

This led to a reassessment of the "training" regime and a re-evaluation of my methods. Did I honestly think that cracking a rod would tame the wildness of youth? It says it will in the Old Testament, but that would lead to a possibly godless fear of punishment. Also I remember my attitude to caning at school, and that was vengeance and hatred towards the perpetrators because it seemed a disproportionate punishment.

Punishment should always be redemptive, corrective, proportionate, leading to a better outcome for the individual and the society which he has offended. Much of the punishment we dole out is very much to satisfy our displeasure and it is easier for us to run for the rod, and get immediate satisfaction, than to think about the causes of the offence and how we can change their behaviour. And because we are bigger than the offender, there is no redress, or arbitration for the one who receives punishment, the child.

The Victorian discipline, austere in the extreme, where the workhouse had to offer welfare marginally less generous than being employed, to act as a deterrent to sloth, where child cruelty went hand in hand with a life of little value, where beatings were a part of life, and led to a social acceptance of violence against the person and poverty as a disincentive no matter what your circumstance. No wonder social reformers set about improving their society.

There is a need for the Christian to think through the way he brings the child up. It is a bit late thinking about it when the child has become delinquent, after the horse, so to speak, has bolted. Neglect of duty will lead to a catastrophic failure, because when we could do something, we didn't do anything. Neglect will have consequences no matter what the field. Neglect, your neglect, will affect their future, so it is worth thinking about the guiding principles and outcomes for your families.

You see what is emerging, instead of treating the child like an animal and just correcting it when it moves out of alignment, giving it a prod with a stick, we should treat the child as an intelligent being made in the image of God, explaining why we are doing what we are doing. It takes up my time, but really,

the problem of the child lies with me, and my unthinking approach to discipline. Just reading the Scriptures to get an answer, is like going to an instruction manual, a look up table, and if the problem with a person is “A”, run your finger along and the solution is “B”. This leads to an unthinking Christianity and this was the problem with the Pharisees, it reduced religion to a list of actions that were like the answers in a text book.

But we see that didn’t go far enough, *Mat 23:23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Mat 23:24 Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel*. We need to get away from that prescriptive view of Law and start to think about what we do, to reflect upon our actions, to see beyond the prescriptive law.

Sadly most Christians use the Bible as a look up table, without thinking what they are doing and just blindly look for textual solutions without considering the wider implications of the precepts. That is why I think that in respect of children, the “whackers”, the “spare the rod” people are hard hearted Christians, and I think there is an even better way to bring up young potential Christians and bring them up Biblically.

The Apostle Paul has been talking about edification, building up the people of God amid all the different gifts that they have and want to use. He says that there is a better way, *1Co 12:31 But desire earnestly the greater gifts, and yet shew I unto you a way of more surpassing excellence*. Darby. Paul declares a better way, a way of love, *1Co 13:1 What if I could speak all languages of humans and of angels? If I did not love others, I would be nothing more than a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 1Co 13:2 What if I could prophesy and understand all secrets and all knowledge? And what if I had faith that moved mountains? I would be nothing, unless I loved others. 1Co 13:3 What if I gave away all that I owned and let myself be burned alive? I would gain nothing, unless I loved others. 1Co 13:4* ***Love is kind and patient, never jealous, boastful, proud, or 1Co 13:5 rude. Love isn't selfish or quick tempered. It doesn't keep a record of wrongs that others do. 1Co 13:6 Love rejoices in the truth, but not in evil. 1Co 13:7 Love is always supportive, loyal, hopeful, and trusting***.

If we had loving hearts instead of hard hearts, we would find ourselves in a whole new realm of operating. We would have something to show the young people, “***Love is kind and patient, never jealous, boastful, proud, or rude. Love isn't selfish or quick tempered. It doesn't keep a record of wrongs that others do. Love rejoices in the truth, but not in evil. Love is always supportive, loyal, hopeful, and trusting”.*** This sounds remarkably like the fruit of the Spirit, *Gal 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-*

suffering, kindness, goodness, fidelity, Gal 5:23 meekness, self-control: against such things there is no law.

Can you see Jesus applying a stick to the children He asked to come to Him, *Mat 19:13 Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. Mat 19:14 But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. Mat 19:15 And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence*. It was the hard hearted disciples who wanted to stop the little children from coming to Jesus, just in the way we stop them from coming by unloving discipline.

The assembly of Jesus has very few sanctions open to it. The Old Testament law is in marked contrast to the New Testament, who do not have the death penalty as a sanction, although God does. In keeping with this, the sanction that a Christian has is separation from the one walking disorderly, not the death penalty, *Tit 3:9 But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain. Tit 3:10 A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; Tit 3:11 Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself*.....*2Th 3:10 For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. 2Th 3:11 For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. 2Th 3:12 Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread*.

I think that before we turn on someone and apply discipline, we need to take a long hard look at ourselves, and our conduct before we act to correct others. The rod might be a short term measure, but like the wicked servant, think that we shall answer for it, *Mat 18:32 Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Mat 18:33 Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? Mat 18:34 And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him*.

Having said what I think of the hard heart, I have not shown the cure, nor have I yet gone into the Christian behaviour which should be manifest in those who call themselves Christians.

6. One Constraint on Growth

Preparatory reading: 1 Peter Chapter 2.

I want to consider our spiritual growth. All living organisms grow. An increase in mass and increase in number of individuals are twin characteristics of growth. A multi-cellular organism grows by cell division. In plants, this growth by cell division occurs continuously throughout their life span. The process in which the shape and structure of an organism get developed is termed morphogenesis. The process in which there are significant changes in the internal and external organs, tissues, and cells of the body of an organism is known as differentiation. Dead organisms do not grow.

Most people stop growing sometime around the age of 20, by this time, our skeletons have reached their final size, and the growth plates between bones have fused closed. Once that happens, there is no way for the bones to grow anymore. Experience of life will still grow and intellectually there is the opportunity for growth. The brain always has the capacity to learn and is not predetermined by biology. The brain continues to change constantly with learning and experience throughout all of life and never becomes fixed and unchanging. Deliberate learning involves making and strengthening connections between associated concepts, rather than the rote learning of disconnected facts. Educators have long noted that one of the best ways to learn something is to teach it to someone else and this process helps solidify new knowledge in your brain.

Malnutrition is the most common cause of growth failure around the world and we would think it very worrying if we had a child that stopped growing because we might think that it has stopped eating. By analogy, the Christian must grow and he must have food, *1Pe 2:2 As newborn babes,* ***desire the sincere milk of the word****, that* ***ye may grow thereby****: 1Pe 2:3 If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious*. He must earnestly desire the unadulterated milk of the Word. It's essential if he is to grow normally and not be stunted and malnourished. This malnourishment of the young convert can be directly related to the community into which he is born and in consequence what he is fed upon.

When a man is brought to consider the claims of Jesus, he is generally pressured into making a commitment or a decision, there and then. It presumes that the person telling him about Jesus has given an accurate picture of what Jesus has done, and that the person being told has understood what is being said to him. This interesting note was put out by the Hills Bible Church

> John the Baptist called on people to repent and believe the good news, *Mat 3:1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, Mat 3:2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. Jesus did the same, *Mat 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. They were calling for people to make a decision. As

> Evangelicals we also call people today to make a decision to follow Christ. This is right and good.
>
> However the call to make a decision can sometimes be divorced from the gospel itself. I was at a church meeting recently where the pastor called for people to make a decision for Christ. There is nothing wrong with that in itself. The problem was that he had not explained the gospel at all. Not a word about sin, judgement, Jesus' death, resurrection, atonement for sin…Just a call to make a decision. A decision divorced from any historical facts and reality about Jesus. I was astounded.
>
> Graeme Goldsworthy writes: "I remember listening to a speaker at an evangelistic meeting whose only mention of the death of Jesus was a passing reference in his closing prayer. I was acting as an advisor to follow up on the after-meeting counselling. I spoke to a young couple who had heard the talk, gone out to the front, been 'counselled' and then brought to me. They obviously had not heard any gospel in either the address or the counselling. They had no idea about being justified by faith in the doing and dying of Christ. It seems that the decision can become everything. People are exhorted to turn to Christ, to receive Christ, to ask Jesus into their hearts, and the like, even when they have been given no substantial idea at all of who Jesus was and what he has done to save us."
>
> Goldsworthy concludes: "The problem is not in the call for a decision. The error of decisionism is to dehistoricise the gospel and to make the decision the saving event."

We should however make a distinction between the Jewish Christians in the early chapters of Acts and the Gentile Christians in the later chapters of Acts. The Jews that became Christians had been steeped in the Scriptures, knew the Law and the prophets, accepted the history of Israel, and believed in Jehovah. They were addressed as people who knew God, *Act 2:37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Act 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost*.

There was conviction, "they were pricked in their heart" by the weight of evidence which they knew to be true. They were told to continue or abide in the truth that they already had, *Act 13:43*
Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

This was certainly different from the gentiles, the Greeks, who needed to start right from the beginning because they had a confusing number of gods, *Act 17:22 Then Paul stood in the centre of Mars' hill and said, "Men, Athenians, I perceive that in all things you are very reverent to deities; Act 17:23 For as I was passing through and observing the objects of your veneration, I also found an altar on which was inscribed, 'To an unknown God.' So then, He Whom you worship in ignorance is the One that I proclaim to you. Act 17:24 He is the God Who made the world and all things that are in it. Being the Lord of heaven and earth, He does not dwell in temples made by hands; Act 17:25 Nor is He served by the hands of men, as though He needs anything, for He gives to all life and breath and all things*. AFV.

Did you ever hear about the Creator and His creation being preached at Evangelistic crusades? No, neither did I, but it's where you have to starts from if you want to build upwards. It is no use looking back and trying to find your origins from reason, you will come up with a variety of "beginnings", and still have no proof that it happened that way. The Bible contains a faith which starts from the beginning and makes man in the image of God, who then falls into sin and is redeemed by God.

Today we have a "one size fits all" Christianity. We assume "a priori" knowledge, a knowledge in the non-Christian, which we think that he has, but in fact he does not have, and we assume that all people come from the same knowledge and cultural background and so it leads to a one size standard Evangelism. But it is not, and there is the need build a solid base with the individual you want saved, so that they will come to know Jesus, the real Jesus, and for that you need to know Jesus for yourself. It's quite a responsibility.

Will the person grow normally or dysfunctionally as a result of **YOUR** lack of knowledge? They will come to a decision along the road, but is it a good decision and does it lead to eternal life? Does it build them up in the truth? Ignorance is a killer, and it is no use blaming others for the false teachings which you absorbed like a sponge. It is good to take a leaf out of the Berean's book, *Act 17:11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and* ***searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so***. They did not become easy believers, but went away to prove what was being taught to them was correct.

Forget whatever you learned about Christianity as an unbeliever. Why? Because you were serving the devil and all that you learned, you learned with the unregenerate mind. As "new born babes" you must feed properly, *1Pe 2:2 As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby,* and it is necessary that you feed on truth.

It is no surprise that we create problems for the new believer if we feed them milk **and** meat, *1Co 3:2 I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able*. You do not feed that mixed diet of milk and meat to babies. We are told in, *Heb 6:1 Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from* ***dead works****, and of faith toward God, Heb 6:2 Of the doctrine of* ***baptisms, and of laying on of hands****, and of* ***resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment****. Heb 6:3 And this will we do, if God permit*.

These teachings, these doctrines are foundational to the faith. They are given to stabilise the Christian life, to create a balance between faith and works, identifying works that are dead and lead nowhere. Baptism is an essential teaching in terms of how we view our entry into the Kingdom. Resurrection and Judgement are necessary to stabilise our faith, *2Ti 2:17 And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; 2Ti 2:18 Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some*.

I would also add more details from the Epistle to the Corinthians, where Paul covers more 'milk' issues, *1Co 3:2 I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. 1Co 3:3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?* This is then expanded to include, factions and following men, divisions in the church, pride, sexual immorality, litigation against believers, principles for marriage and widowhood, idols and idolatry, the conscience, freedoms and their limits, head coverings and the Lord's Supper.

But the largest constraint on growth is not the acceptance or rejection of one or two doctrines, it is whether the convert is all out for Christ, who said **"Follow ME"**. From that moment of interest in Christ, from that commitment to Christ as Saviour, it should be a continuous growth and continuous interest in the things of Christ. Sadly, the people who make a one off commitment and go no further with Christ are fooling themselves, and like the seed perish, *Mat 13:19 When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. Mat 13:20 But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Mat 13:21 Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. Mat 13:22 He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful*.

Church becomes a substitute for Jesus. Instead of spending time getting to know Him, the activities of the church become a replacement for Him. Like a replacement meal, the church offers you a liquidised meal, easy to digest, containing all their vital elements, and becomes a substitute to replace the "sincere milk" of the Word. Instead of you studying, you pay somebody else to do it for you and you become a cripple, leaning on them as crutches for life. You get engaged in works that the early church new nothing of, food banks for example, for the terminally indolent, rather than getting the people to work with their own hands. I am not discouraging good works but they are incidental to following Jesus, and manufacturing victims does not help. And there is also that behemoth of a denominational church that you join, because it feels cosy, and surely the majority of followers can't be wrong, so your days are spent hiding behind the mask of religion, in a social club.

Well, are there few that are saved? *Luk 13:23 Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Luk 13:24 Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. Luk 13:25 When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you,* ***I know you not whence ye are****: Luk 13:26 Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. Luk 13:27 But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity…….. Mat 7:13 Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Mat 7:14 Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and* ***few there be that find it***.

It makes it quite clear that the majority of people who have a religious attitude fail to get in, "*Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets"* but they do not find the way in. They say, "*thou hast taught in our streets",* but it did not do them any good, because it never led them to that narrow gate, *Mat 7:14 But the gate to life is very narrow. The road that leads there is so hard to follow that only a few people find it*. CEV.

Those important first steps, questioning everything, not making a commitment to any man before you are sure of them, holding Jesus above all men, continuously feeding on the Word of God are essential to a Christian life. Finding out the truth for yourself before committing to anything man tells you. If we come to Jesus as a "mother" in the faith, why do we follow on with men?

The baby hardly ever leaves the mothers' arms, but is constantly talked to, and nourished, cared for until they are capable of doing things for themselves. It is strange to see that the Christian is expected to function as a "grown up" from

the start of his life, and where they are expected to walk, talk, and understand everything as an adult. This is at odds with the statements of the New Testament where maturity is something that comes with growth.

In my generation, I did not have any local churches that I could respect and who had the knowledge and ability to deal with new believers. I am sure that this was not so in every generation, but we have seen a continuance of the downgrade where the modern day churches think more of form than of substance. If we trust our lives to such ministries we shall die because they offer no milk and later on no meat.

The church ministers seem to be thoroughly disconnected with the work of Jesus. They are not prepared for the births that come to them, and they do not nourish them and guide them. They just go on their way, neglecting the newborns, and after a number of years you will see dissent grow, because the people's needs as young Christians were not met adequately.

The one constraint to our growth is the Word of God, nothing else, and we, as older Christians, are to supply this milk. If we follow the Word we are heading in the right direction with Jesus.

7. The Broad Way and the Narrow Way

Preparatory reading: Matthew Chapter 7 vv 15 - 29

The Christian walk is like negotiating a tightrope over an abyss, and we have been told this, *Mat 7:13 Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Mat 7:14 Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it*. Why don't we hear more about this considering its importance? I think that because most of us presume we are on the path of life having made a commitment to Jesus, and think we are alright because of this.

There are only two gates to life, one is constricted and one is very wide. We would think that the wide one, accommodating more people, is the one to go in at, because surely Jesus is concerned with the number of believers that are saved, and His mission was to save the lost, wasn't it, not to deter them? Surely the narrow gate is for narrow minded people, people you cannot have fun with, the "holy Joes" of this world, religious people. Besides, it's harder to go through a narrow gate and it takes more effort, and so it's a bad choice. Also at check-in, you can take more baggage on the broad way, so I've been told, and this makes it a better choice.

There is no man to advise you or to stop you choosing either gate, but there is a whole book of Scripture which will help you make an informed choice of where you enter. Like Pilgrim in Pilgrims Progress you are directed to this narrow gate, the wicket gate, not a “Broad-way Gate, a lane called Dead Man’s Lane” but “Look before thee; dost thou see this **narrow way**? THAT is the way thou must go; it was cast up by the patriarchs, prophets, Christ, and His Apostles; and it is as straight as a rule can make it. This is the way thou must go.” Charles Spurgeon read Pilgrims Progress at least 100 times in his life, and had this comment to make on it,

> “I believe I have read it through at least a hundred times. It is a volume of which I never seem to tire; and the secret of its freshness is that it is so largely compiled from the Scriptures.” As Spurgeon said elsewhere, he loved Bunyan because Bunyan bled Bible. But he did have one qualm with the great book: “I am a great lover of John Bunyan, but I do not believe him infallible; and the other day I met with a story about him which I think a very good one”.
>
> There was a young man, in Edinburgh, who wished to be a missionary. He was a wise young man; he thought—“If I am to be a missionary, there is no need for me to transport myself far away from home; I may as well be a missionary in Edinburgh.” . . .
>
> Well, this young man started, and determined to speak to the first person he met. He met one of those old fishwives; those of us who have seen them can never forget them, they are extraordinary women indeed. So, stepping up to her, he said, “Here you are, coming along with your burden on your back; let me ask you if you have got another burden, a spiritual burden.” “What!” she asked; “do you mean that burden in John Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress? Because, if you do, young man, I got rid of that many years ago, probably before you were born. But I went a better way to work than the pilgrim did. The evangelist that John Bunyan talks about was one of your parsons that do not preach the gospel; for he said, ‘Keep that light in thine eye, and run to the wicket-gate.’ Why—man alive!—that was not the place for him to run to. He should have said, ‘Do you see that cross? Run there at once!’ But, instead of that, he sent the poor pilgrim to the wicket-gate first; and much good he got by going there! He got tumbling into the slough, and was like to have been killed by it.”
>
> “But did not you,” the young man asked, “go through any Slough of Despond?” “Yes, I did; but I found it a great deal easier going through with my burden off than with it on my back.”

> The old woman was quite right. John Bunyan put the getting rid of the burden too far off from the commencement of the pilgrimage. **If he meant to show what usually happens, he was right; but if he meant to show what ought to have happened, he was wrong**. We must not say to the sinner, “Now, sinner, if thou wilt be saved, go to the baptismal pool; go to the wicket-gate; go to the church; do this or that.”
>
> No, the cross should be right in front of the wicket-gate; and we should say to the sinner, “Throw thyself down there, and thou art safe; but thou are not safe till thou canst cast off thy burden, and lie at the foot of the cross, and find peace in Jesus.”

There is no doubt that we are to enter in at the gate of Christ and His cross and not satan’s temple gate. We go through Jesus, not around Him, and being in Him there are some things that we cannot take with us. So we find scattered around the narrow gate our bundles and burdens, but no such things are found at the broad gate. No Scripture puts it better than this, ***Heb 12:1*** *Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses,* ***let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us****, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Heb 12:2* ***Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith****; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God*. The Weight and Sin, which do so easily beset us and that thwart us.

I distinguish weights from sins, as weights being the external burdens and sins as being the internal burdens, the things which stop us from functioning. These weights and sins are laid at the narrow gate, at the feet of Jesus. They are no part of Him, they do not figure in His kingdom. What can they be? They are the works of the flesh, what works in the body of the natural man, *Gal 5:16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. Gal 5:17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. Gal 5:18 But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. Gal 5:19* ***Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Gal 5:20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Gal 5:21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God***.

If we do these things, the works of the flesh, we must understand the implications, and we shall not inherit the kingdom of God, because if we do them, we compromise the position of Jesus. It may be just one of them, wrath,

passion or anger, and not all the others, but that singular work of the flesh, denies you entry to the kingdom. Pray for strength to overcome the evil spoken of here.

How do I overcome it? It is by generating the fruit of the spirit over against the works of the flesh. The natural man, because of his sinful nature will gravitate towards the works of the flesh. The gates are wide open to the natural man who treads the broad way. But the man who is born again hates his flesh, and produces fruit meet for repentance, as John said, *Luk 3:8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham*.

The man entering the narrow gate has already encountered Jesus and so he stops at the threshold. He has got rid of the old man that burdened him, because he found the cross and Christ. He stops on the other side of that narrow gate and begins putting on the new man, *Eph 4:22 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; Eph 4:23 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; Eph 4:24 And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*.

It is only when you have come through Jesus that you can be fruitful, *Joh 10:9 I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture*. And that list of virtues will just grow and grow as they are exercised, *Gal 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Gal 5:23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. Gal 5:24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. Gal 5:25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Gal 5:26 Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another*.

Now go back and look at those people who profess Christ and heard Him in our streets. Where are they in respect of these two gates? The most terrible thing that can happen to a man, is to think that they are going to heaven, and find out that they have wasted a lifetime and eternity, by not changing from and earth bound to a heaven bound creature*, Rom 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. Rom 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed* ***(μεταμορφόω*** *metamorphosed)) by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God*.

They thought that Christianity was just an acceptance, an acknowledgement of Jesus' death, and that was it. But the death of Jesus is only made effective for you by going through that narrow gate and growing in the things of Jesus.

Stopping at the cross puts you in the very position of the disciples of Jesus when He died, just onlookers and nothing else. The transformation of you from the earthly to the spiritual has not yet begun.

Let us take a closer look at the verse, *Luk 13:24 Strive with earnestness to enter in through the narrow door, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter in and will not be able.* Darby. A door or a gate is also a good metaphor for safety. The gate, πύλη= pulē, is used to keep things out which have no place in your domain, *Joh 10:7 Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. Joh 10:8 All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. Joh 10:9 I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture*. It also safeguards what is kept in by the gate.

It is a narrow door, constricted. You may remember the film, The 300, about 300 Spartan warriors fighting the Persian army. It attempted to recreate the battle of Thermopylae, where Leonidas kept the great Persian army at bay with a small band of Spartans. It is estimated that the Spartans killed 20,000 Persians in a narrow pass at Thermopylae, which incidentally means the hot gates, a source of molten sulphur. A constricted entry is very hard to enter and easy to defend.

It is very difficult to enter the kingdom of God, because as it says, "*many, I say to you, will seek to enter in and will not be able".* But I thought that Jesus welcomed all comers, and doesn't He say, *Mat 11:28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Mat 11:29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. Mat 11:30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*. That is correct, He does say "Come", but He also says "***Take my yoke upon you***". If you do not take the yoke of Christ, you are not willing to share the hardships of Christ, then you had better forget Christianity. It is not for you because you cannot walk with Him.

Were you ever told this when you were first told about the Saviour Jesus? The easy "believism" will tell you to just make a decision for Jesus and all your earthly worries will be over, but Matthew tells us we must make an entry to the heavenly kingdom, through a narrow gate. In fact it is not just a walk through, but something we strive over, agonise over, *Luk 13:24* ***Strive to enter*** *in at the strait gate:* The word transliterated is ἀγωνίζομαι = agōnizomai, agonize, the root being used of Jesus in the garden, praying for the cup to depart him, *Luk 22:44 And being in an* ***agony*** *he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground*.

That certainly seems more than a casual response to the Gospel call, indeed a lot of introspection is needed before you can adequately progress your faith. How do people expect babies to do this and come to a knowledge of saving grace, by the

action of throwing a cup of water over them? It does not tell you to throw water over them, to “christen” them, but the Scripture says, “strive to enter in” to the kingdom. The Greek present tense indicates a continuing action, something that happens continuously or repeatedly, or something that is in the process of happening. Striving, that is a life’s work, not something you accomplish by a man made ceremony.

I did not know anything about this when I was confronted with the claims of Jesus. The Christians that I spoke with were all “babes” and no one addressed the steps and changes in that Christian life. It was presumed that you were there in the kingdom and you could live whatever life you pleased. Churches were like different “clubs” and it didn’t matter what one you went to, they all let you have a Christianity which suited you. I never heard much about pleasing the Lord, it was mentioned, but it usually meant pleasing yourself, and we went on like old Israel, *Jdg 17:5 And the man Micah had an house of gods, and made an ephod, and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest. Jdg 17:6 In those days there was no king in Israel,* ***but every man did that which was right in his own eyes*****.**

This is the reason mankind seeks to make an ecumenical movement. It is because they do not follow the path that Jesus ordained and, “***every man did that which was right in his own eyes”.*** They impose their different rules, different ideas, different styles on men, and are not joined to Jesus, *Col 2:19* ***And not joined to the Head****, from whom all the body, being given strength and* ***kept together*** *through its joins and bands, has its growth with the increase of God.* BBE.

The body is kept together by being joined to the Head, and so you see man’s attempt at reconnecting the body is by compromise and neglect of the Word. It will function perfectly correctly when we go back to His plan, when we stop doing “***that which was right in his own eyes”,*** when we follow His way, when we strive to enter in at the narrow gate, it is then we begin to function correctly.

8. Believers Gathering

Preparatory reading: Revelation Chapters 2 and 3.

I would advise people seeking fellowship in Jesus to tread very carefully as to who you begin to trust and avoid making snap decisions about “churches” before you have read your Bible through at least once! You should be following Jesus and not men. You will see differences in the way others follow, because they pickup habits which are not Scriptural. I am not saying do not meet with Christians, but test what the people, who say they are Christians, are saying and doing.

There is no urgency about joining a church, because the very fact you have come to Jesus for the life giving salvation, means that **you already have become a member of the Church**, *Heb 12:22* ***But ye are come*** *unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, Heb 12:23* ***To the general assembly and church of the firstborn****, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, Heb 12:24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel*.

When men say to you that you must join a church, and hurry you into a decision, they are very similar to the scammers, who try to get you to make a snap decision over your finances and commit to what they say. To rush you into a decision. You do not have to make a snap decision because the decision has been made for you, and you have a place in Jesus' heavenly Church. Unfortunately, a "church" has become synonymous with a building, so we should be very careful to explain our terms.

The church is as old as man and it existed way back as a "congregation of the faithful", the "gathering of believers", the "called out ones", the "church of God", the "Assembly of God's people", *Lev 8:3 And gather thou all the congregation together unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation*. The Greek version says, *Lev 8:3 And let all the congregation* ***συναγωγή*** *hold an assembly* ***ἐκκλησία*** *at the door of the tent of the testimony!* APB. The congregation, or synagogue, hold an assembly, or Church, ἐκκλησία, at the door of the Tabernacle. There it is, the Church in the Old Testament, and we see that a synagogue is a church, without any bricks in sight, because it is made of people, the Church of the firstborn. A church is a group of likeminded people seeking the Lord Jesus, at His door. You don't go to church but you are a church as a group of people that reside in Jesus.

One thing you may be taught, and one of the first things that you have to do is to get to a "church" and become a member of it, something which scripture definitely does not tell you to do. I will take this example from https://www.9marks.org/answer/why-should-every-christian-join-church/ , which is fairly typical of this teaching and it is wrong,

> Every Christian should join a church because Scripture requires it (sic!). Granted, **there is no direct command in Scripture that says, "Every Christian must join a local church,"** but two factors in Scripture indicate that every Christian should be a member of a local church.

1. Jesus established the church to be a public, earthly institution that would mark out, affirm, and oversee those who profess to believe in him (Matt. 16:18-19, 18:15-20).
2. Scripture repeatedly commands Christians to submit to their leaders (Heb. 13:17; 1 Thess. 5:12-13). The only way to do that is by publicly committing to be members of their flock, and saying in effect, “I commit to listening to your teaching, following your direction, and to submitting to your leadership.” There’s no way to obey the scriptural commands to submit to your leaders if you never actually *submit* to them by joining a local church.

He says, “Every Christian should join a church because Scripture requires it. Granted, **there is no direct command in Scripture that says, “Every Christian must join a local church””.** So make up your mind, “there is no direct scripture requiring it”, and yet, “every Christian must join a local church”. Which is it? You see what happens when you wander off of the path of Scripture, you get totally confused.

Let us examine these two headings. Firstly, Jesus is speaking under the Old Testament in point 1, and clearly shows the existence of the church in the Old Testament. The presumption that you have to go to a specific church is another thing, because there are churches, or assemblies which are built by men, as opposed to the church of Christ, *Mat 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock **I will build my church**; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Mat 16:19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven*.

The second scripture that is quoted in support of going to a church is, *Mat 18:15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. Mat 18:16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. Mat 18:17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Mat 18:18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Mat 18:19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. Mat 18:20 **For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them***. Would that the cowards in churches would do this.

It is clear that Jesus comes to the faithful gathered in His Name. But it does not say what local church it is that you should go to. Are they really telling you, you should go to a group of people who do not believe in a historical Jesus, a virgin birth, the crucifixion, the creation by Jesus in six days? Are they telling you to sit under a one man ministry, who does not know what a calling is?

Point 2 says, “Scripture repeatedly commands Christians to submit to their leaders”, and gives two proof texts, *Heb 13:17 Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: **for they watch for your souls**, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.....1Th 5:12 And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; 1Th 5:13 And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves*.

I don’t see the people who rule, do so without the consent of believers, and these people who claim to watch over you, must get to know you and the people thoroughly, else they do not watch thoroughly. How many of these great leaders know much more than the name of the person in their congregation, and how many leaders create the regular forums for getting to know the brethren, like a shared meal. These meetings should take place regularly. The scripture in Thessalonians also says that we should get to know the people who have taken upon themselves the role of leadership, but this too is neglected. How many believers invite their leaders around to their home to get to know them? And it doesn’t say that leadership is a one man band.

If you are going to go to a local church, then you have set yourself the task of finding out if the leader**s** are faithful to God’s word, take an interest to know you, are leading you onward in Jesus, or whether they are the sort of people who are “doing church” for a living, probably because they couldn’t get a job doing anything else.

As a young Christian in these days you must be wary, *2Pe 2:1 Sometimes false prophets spoke to the people of Israel. False teachers will also sneak in and speak harmful lies to you. But these teachers don't really belong to the Master who paid a great price for them, and they will quickly destroy themselves. 2Pe 2:2 Many people will follow their evil ways and cause others to tell lies about the true way. 2Pe 2:3 They will be greedy and cheat you with smooth talk. But long ago God decided to punish them, and God doesn't sleep*. CEV.

I think that we have “churches” today, but we justify the position that we already have, the structure, leadership, format of worship, membership, rules, denomination by looking back in the Scriptures to find justification for the way we do things, rather than getting our practices sorted by what the Scripture says and finding out for ourselves what we should be doing.

It was fortuitous for me that Britain had a petrol shortage in 1974. During the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, Arab members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) imposed an embargo against the United States in retaliation for the U.S. decision to re-supply the Israeli military and to gain leverage in the post-war peace negotiations. This affected supply in Britain, and it impacted us locally. In those days you chose your flavour of religion and went to a congregation that suited you, but with travel restricted, a few of us Christians, from different denominations came together in our homes, on the estate where we lived and did something that was radical at the time, we decided to go back to basics, try and shelve our pet denominations, and find out what we really should be doing as Christians.

This seemed very scary at the time, and we didn't have much knowledge of the church, except what we had picked up from our denominations. We were not sure whether we could take the Lord's Table without having an "ordained" minister, we didn't know if we could baptise anybody, we didn't know what membership was, we didn't know what the order of meetings were, whether you should meet multiple times on Sunday, whether Sunday was a Sabbath, did we tithe, how did we serve each other, and the list went on. But with Scripture as our guide, we gradually moulded ourselves into a New Testament church, or at least a fledgling church. We did not have all knowledge and wisdom, but we were determined to honour Jesus as best we could.

The days have gone swiftly by since then, and it occurred to me that I at least document some of the roads that I have travelled, and that young Christians would perhaps avoid the errors that come with learning from scratch. Though having said that, you must, *1Th 5:21 Prove all things; hold fast that which is good*.

One thing is clear and that is we are servants to Jesus forever and the churches that we come together as/in will die and are changing continuously, our family are gradually going to glory, we move about and soon, whatever we did will be forgotten on earth, because we are moving to the great reality, the church above, the church eternal.

However much we seek to find the perfect church, it will elude us because we are imperfect, *1Co 13:11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, and I made plans like a child. When I became a man, I stopped those childish ways. 1Co 13:12 It is the same with us. Now we see God as if we are looking at a reflection in a mirror. But then, in the future, we will see him right before our eyes. Now I know only a part, but at that time I will know fully, as God has known me.* ERV. The church on earth is but a shadow of Jesus' Church in heaven, and of course you will not find a perfect church in a sinful world, especially when you cannot see God clearly.

Seven flavours of “churches” are put before us in the book of Revelation. We learn that as individuals, we cannot hide behind the façade of a denomination, for we are each of us responsible to hold on to the truth. The different churches all have an exhortation to overcome, for example, *Rev 2:7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God*.

“Overcome” what? The Greek word νικάω = nikaō means to subdue, conquer, overcome, prevail, get the victory. It is, according to the passages in Revelation, victory over the flesh and the devil, *Rev 2:4 Yet I have diagnosed you with one serious problem: You have let go of your first love. Rev 2:5 I implore you, remember the pinnacle of purity from which you have fallen! Turn back to your first love and practice again the methods you practiced before. If you do not turn back, the light of truth will be lost to you and your minds will be darkened.....Rev 2:14 Yet I have diagnosed a few serious problems: Some of you are like Balaam, seeking to empower and enrich yourselves. You have infected the Remedy with appeasement theology, and you promote sexual practices deviant from my design in Eden. Rev 2:15 And as if this isn’t bad enough, you have those who advocate the hedonistic practices of the Nicolaitans, which destroy the mind.....Rev 2:20 Yet I have diagnosed this problem: You have accepted the teachings of Jezebel, which make me look like Baal—a being who imposes law, inflicts torture, and must be appeased. Her teachings mislead people into internalizing pagan ideas about God—including God being like Baal and requiring bloody payments—and thus committing spiritual adultery by giving their hearts to a false god. Rev 2:21 I have given her time to turn away from the lies about God, but she refuses; Rev 2:22 so I will let her reap the suffering that comes from operating outside my design for life. And all those who accept her view of God commit adultery with her and will suffer terribly unless they reject the lies and return to the truth about God and his methods of love.....Rev 3:3 Remember the Remedy you have received: accept it, apply it to your lives, and turn away from the ways of the world. But if you refuse to wake up to your condition and embrace the truth, you will be unaware of what is happening, and my coming will be like a thief’s—you will not know the time I will come to you. Rev 3:8 I know your choices. Recognize that I have opened before you a door for your healing, which no one can shut. I know you are exhausted but you have not given up. You have lived in harmony with my methods and have not rejected my character of love. Rev 3:9 But those whose minds have become a sanctuary for Satan—who claim to be my children but are liars, as their characters are like Satan’s—I will make them see the truth, and they will fall down at your feet and acknowledge that what I love is my children being healed, like you.....Rev 3:17 You claim to be spiritually rich and full of heavenly treasure, thinking you have the truth and need nothing, but you are so self-deceived that you don’t realize you are devoid of my character of love. You are decrepit, pathetic, bereft of true godliness, with minds so closed*

that you can't even comprehend truth. You stand naked and exposed. Rev 3:18 My prescription for you is to exchange your corrupt motives for the gold of godly love, purified through fiery trials, so that you can be rich in what heaven values. Exchange your filthy, selfish characters for the perfect character of Christ —pure and white—so that you can cover the shame of your imperfection. And apply the salve of the Holy Spirit to your minds so that you can see and understand the reality of your own condition, and that of God's kingdom of love. Remedy*.*

Surprisingly, the churches duties do not include hymn singing, sermons, rituals, men in drag pretending to be somebody religious, collections etc., but a church is that which puts evil away and it is a very personal thing. Just make sure that you are concentrating on your duty or you will not be a victor.

Church is not a cosy Hotel or waiting room where you kick your heels until you are called to glory. It is active service on a war footing, *Eph 6:12 We are not fighting against humans. We are fighting against forces and authorities and against rulers of darkness and powers in the spiritual world. Eph 6:13 So put on all the armor that God gives. Then when that evil day comes, you will be able to defend yourself. And when the battle is over, you will still be standing firm*. CEV.

9. Hearing the Voice of God

Preparatory reading: Acts Chapter 10 and Romans Chapter 1.

This is a disputed area in Christianity and not one which is talked about very much. Christians say that they are "led by the Spirit" to do something, or that "the Lord told them" to do something, or that they "were called" to some position, which you might think meant that they had a distinct verbal instruction given by an angel or by the Lord Himself. Upon closer enquiry, you find out that there was no voice, just a feeling and that somebody else had given a tenuous support to that feeling.

The thing to challenge those people on, is to get them to say, "thus says the Lord" before they make a pronouncement because, *Deu 18:20 But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die*. The Christian will back off from his great pronouncements with this sanction hanging over him.

The Lord does not speak with everybody and a few persons are given to convey His messages to the world, and the chosen messengers may have one or two

direct revelations from the Person of God in a lifetime. Yet we are encouraged to pray without ceasing and pray for all men, but how do we get the answers to prayer if it is not by a direct verbal answer?

The fledgling church was threatened by the rulers and elders and scribes, so they gathered and prayed about it, *Act 4:29 And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, Act 4:30 By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. Act 4:31 And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness*.

They were very specific in their prayer. They ask the Lord for boldness to speak the word in the face of threats and they ask for signs and wonders to be done by Jesus. It was something they were prepared to put their own necks on the line for, not pray for someone else to undertake. When they had stopped praying, the place shook and the people were filled with the Spirit and..... and this is important, "***they spake the word of God with boldness***", not their own words but God's Word. They did not seek anything else but to fulfil Jesus' great commission, *Mat 28:18 And Jesus coming up spoke to them, saying, All power has been given me in heaven and upon earth. Mat 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them to the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; Mat 28:20 teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have enjoined you. And behold, *I* am with you all the days, until the completion of the age*. Darby.

The prayers that we are looking at are the requests to God for something to advance the kingdom of God not prayers of praise or personal needs though these can be valid prayers. **This type of prayer is in a sense seeking God's prior input and blessing on an endeavour, which will aim to fulfil God's word**. It seems to me that so many prayers do not work out, because they do not fulfil the Word of God, *Jas 4:3 Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts*. If we are co-workers with God, we should stick to His plan and not our plan, *2Co 6:1 Since **we are God's coworkers**, we urge you not to let God's kindness be wasted on you. 2Co 6:2 God says, "At the right time I heard you. On the day of salvation I helped you." Listen, now is God's acceptable time! Now is the day of salvation! 2Co 6:3 We don't give people any opportunity to find fault with how we serve*.

I think that one reason that we do not get direct answers to our prayers, is because the answer to what we pray for lies in the Word of God and what is not given must also count as an answer. For example, asking to win the lottery so that you will be rich, or getting healed so that you can continue playing your empty pastimes, whereas God writes, *Jas 4:3 Yet even when you do pray, your*

prayers are not answered, because you pray just for selfish reasons. CEV. That is an answer in the negative. Of course many interpret the events that occur favourably as an answer to prayer, and that therefore they are right with God, but this is not always so, *Psa 73:12 Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches*.

The “answers” to prayer differ but the prayers do not, because they are “seeking God’s prior input and blessing on an endeavour, which will aim to fulfil God’s word”. The prayer of the disciples to know God’s will, in replacing the Apostle Judas, came from a desire to fulfil Scripture, the Word of God, *Act 1:20 For it is* ***written in the book of Psalms****, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take*. They set about the replacement by first praying for God’s choice, and rather than let a man choose who it would be, they fell on providence as being God’s choice method of answering, and cast lots, *Act 1:24 And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, Act 1:25 That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. Act 1:26 And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles*. God did not answer them directly by His voice but by His word.

The important choice of servants for the church, to oversee the distribution of food, were chosen by the people, but sanctified by prayer and confirmed by the laying on of hands, *Act 6:5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: Act 6:6 Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. Act 6:7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.* They prayed but the answer was in their hands and not in words from the Lord.

Cornelius a centurion, was fasting and praying down in Caesarea Maritime, being a devout proselyte, Act *10:30 And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, Act 10:31 And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God*. He was heard for his charity before God, but the answer to prayer was in a vision, by a messenger from God. Not exactly a direct answer, but an answer from heaven.

Cornelius received instruction to go and send men to Joppa, or Jaffa, a distance of about 38 miles, to Simon the tanner’s house, to meet with Simon Peter and to await instructions. Meanwhile in Jaffa, Peter is taught a lesson, in preparation for the visitors. Peter is taught, that being a Jew, he must get it out of his head that the Gentiles are ritually unclean, and he is taught the lesson by going into a

trance and seeing a sheet containing all manner of creatures, *Act 10:10 And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, Act 10:11 And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: Act 10:12 Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. Act 10:13 And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat*.

The upshot of the two men's experience of visions while praying, in different geographical locations, was to bring them together, Jew and Gentile, for purpose of unifying the growing body of Christ. This shows that prayer, whether for a specific request or not, will lead men into the place where God wants them, and He will speak on what He wants to speak and He will do what He wants to do. We are thereby the recipients of His grace for achieving His purpose, "*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them to the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit".*

There is in that early church something which is totally missing in modern Evangelism. There is not the great trumpeting about a man coming to preach, heal, or do wonders, in a huge campaign that requires organising by hundreds of volunteers. There are not endless rallies to try and persuade men of Jesus, large advertisements telling about where the rallies will be taking place. No ordinary believers thinking that because someone else is fronting evangelism, all the work is done and you don't have to bother doing it. It was led by the Spirit in times past and so we should each seek to get back to the personal evangelism of the time past, not the impersonal mass evangelism which does not produce much lasting fruit.

The Lord spoke to the early Christians in various ways, many non-verbal, but all for the prime directive of building Jesus kingdom, not for selfish ends. Where does He speak to this generation, because He is not doing the same things that He did in olden times, and you only have to look at what the churches are doing to see this? Are the people hearing their own voice and making out it is the voice of God?

You have often heard the "voice within you", telling you to do things and you can interpret it as you wish. You will interpret it as the voice of God when you want to do something. Pleasure will outweigh rationality and that desire of your heart, that feeling that it is right, that pleasure you have, and that is where you can go wrong, *Gen 3:6 The woman stared at the fruit. It looked beautiful and tasty. She wanted the wisdom that it would give her, and she ate some of the fruit. Her husband was there with her, so she gave some to him, and he ate it too. Gen 3:7 Right away they saw what they had done, and they realized they were naked. Then they sewed fig leaves together to make something to cover themselves*. CEV.

How would you know what the source of the “voice within” is? Is it God or is it the devil? What can arbitrate for you to determine the real source of your “voice within”? It has to be a “voice without”, a standard throughout and beyond generations, beyond the changing philosophies of man, beyond time. *Mat 24:35 Heaven and earth shall pass away, but* ***my words shall not pass away****.....Mat 5:18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass,* ***one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law****, till all be fulfilled.* The Word of God and His Law is immutable.

This is the thing that has been cast to the wind by many contemporary Christians, in all areas of their thinking, *2Ti 4:2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. 2Ti 4:3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; 2Ti 4:4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables*.

The modern Christians hear the voice of a “god” telling them that there is no need any more for sexual propriety and the relationships that are homosexual are correct, in fact anything goes and every relationship goes. This is the voice of satan, because it opposes the Word of God, *Rom 1:26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: Rom 1:27 And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. Rom 1:28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient*.

Isaac was deceived by Jacob when giving the birthright because he was led by his senses, *Gen 27:21 And Isaac said unto Jacob, Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou be my very son Esau or not. Gen 27:22 And Jacob went near unto Isaac his father; and he felt him, and said,* ***The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau****. Gen 27:23 And he discerned him not, because his hands were hairy, as his brother Esau's hands: so he blessed him.*

The modern Christians hear the voice of a “god” telling them that there is no creator, and that life is a result of random process, denying that every part of Creation contains the knowledge of God, *Joh 1:3 All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. Joh 1:4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men. Joh 1:5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.* They do this while hanging on to a religion.

The modern Christians hear the voice of a “god” telling them that the Scripture is unreliable, full of fables, untrustworthy history and is only fit for children. But it is this selfsame Word is that which enables us to function, *2Ti 3:15 And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 2Ti 3:16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 2Ti 3:17 That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works*.

If we despise the Scripture as God’s Word, we shall be casting ourselves adrift without a compass to negotiate life and to communicate with God. Man’s natural arrogance and thoughts are constantly being consigned to the rubbish bin. Take the example of Junk DNA, originally thought to be non-coding,

> Geneticist Susumu Ohno coined the phrase "junk DNA" in his 1972 paper, "So Much 'Junk' DNA in our Genome." Four years later, Richard Dawkins published The Selfish Gene, which popularized the idea that genes are the basis of evolutionary selection. Any DNA that was not actively trying to get to the next generation -- namely junk DNA -- was slowly decaying away through mutation, Dawkins wrote.

They were way off course with their thinking, but the Creationists, who held to God being a purposeful Creator, were proven correct in their belief. The Bible does have something to say about Science. The Bible has a lot to say about morality, the family, faith, but most of all Jesus who is the epicentre of all things.

God does not have to communicate regularly with us because He has given us His handbook of life, the owner’s manual, the Bible and the problems are dealt with in there. Being “in Christ”, a phrase used some 78 times in the Bible, we do not have to get verbal communication with God, we are with God, *1Co 1:30 But of him **are ye in Christ Jesus**, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: 1Co 1:31 That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord*.

The position of being in Christ as opposed to being out of Christ, has a wonderful effect on the believer. It means that looking out will give a totally different world view, because everything we examine will be seen through the lens of Jesus. The more we seek Him and the power of His resurrection, the less we will be rudderless in this world, and the less we shall ask God to speak to us because we shall find that He has spoken.

10..... The Church in the Old Testament

Preparatory reading: Exodus Chapters 20 and 21, Deuteronomy Chapter 24.

One of my memories going back many years was of a dear older brother who was normally incredibly gracious and did not have a bad word to say about anybody. I was having some fellowship with him one lunch time, and the subject of the church came up. He said the birth of the church occurred on the day of Pentecost. I had just been reading Acts and I said no, because the church existed in the Old Testament, *Act 7:37 This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. Act 7:38 This is he, that was in* ***the church in the wilderness*** *with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us*:

I was not anticipating his response. I could have said something blasphemous and it would not have caused the anger with which he spoke to me. I was more than taken aback by his behaviour, and that was my introduction to Dispensationalism. It is not an isolated incident and many times I have had the same response from people who have had a pet teaching shredded by the Scripture. Here is a typical view of the church you can find on the internet,

> The word “church” does not appear in the Old Testament but it appears about 120 times in the gospels and the New Testament. The original word translated “church” from original manuscripts is “ekklesia.” This word is the Greek word kaleo (to call), with the prefix ek (out). In English the word is translated from the original "called out ones" to “church.”

This is very wrong on two counts. It depends on what version you use because it is in the Septuagint Bible, the Greek version of the Old Testament, *Deu 9:10 And the LORD delivered unto me two tables of stone written with the finger of God; and on them was written according to all the words, which the LORD spake with you in the mount out of the midst of the fire in the day of the* ***assembly*** (ἐκκλησίας = הקהל = church). The word “church” IS in the Old Testament.

But there are two clear references to “church” in the Old Testament and they come from Jesus, *Mat 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock* ***I will build my church****; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.....Mat 18:17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if* ***he neglect to hear the church****, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.* They both occur in the Old Testament not the New Testament. What, I hear you cry, the Gospels are New Testament. No they are not. Jesus is speaking under the First Covenant, **because Jesus has not yet died upon the cross and the Old Covenant is still in full vigour**. The

Gospels are for the greater part, Old Testament writings. The church, to Jesus, existed as a body of believers, as an assembly, as a synagogue, so we are quite wrong to say that the word church does not appear in the Old Testament. It appears 77 times in 73 verses of the Old Testament Septuagint, as ἐκκλησία.

That body of people, who came out of Egypt, were the Church in the wilderness of Sinai, and have as much claim to the title "church" as we do. But they were a church on earth, much the same as the New Testament church is a church on earth. I think that the church has two components, one earthly and one spiritual and you and I are in one group or the other group.

The New Testament talks about a heavenly, spiritual people, *Heb 12:22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, Heb 12:23 To the general assembly and* ***church of the firstborn****,* ***which are written in heaven****, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, Heb 12:24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel*. It says that the church was already in the Old Testament, for we come from the Sion of God David's spiritual home.

At the same time it talks about heavenly and earthly people, *Rev 3:14 And unto the angel of* ***the church of the Laodiceans*** *write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; Rev 3:15 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. Rev 3:16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth……Rev 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. Rev 3:21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. Rev 3:22 He that hath an ear, let him.* The carnal man has no entry to the kingdom, *Gal 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Gal 5:20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Gal 5:21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God*.

The church may exist on earth and everyone who says they are members of the church are generally accepted. But its conditions for entering heaven are very much stricter. There is no way that these earthly people are acceptable in the heavenly, spiritual church, although they might be considered members of the earthly manifestation of that body. That heavenly body has always had Jesus as Lord from the very beginning of mankind, as the Belgic confession, 1561, states,

> This Church hath been from the beginning of the world and will be to the end thereof, which is evident from this, that Christ is an eternal king, which, without subjects He cannot be. And this holy Church is preserved or supported by God against the rage of the whole world; though she sometimes (for a while) appears very small, and in the eyes of men, to be reduced to nothing, as during the perilous reign of Ahab when nevertheless the Lord reserved unto Him seven thousand men, who had not bowed their knees to Baal.
>
> Furthermore, this holy Church is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed over the whole world; and yet is joined and united with heart and will, by the power of faith, in one and the same spirit.

What were the duties of the church of the Israelites in the wilderness? There is so much written about the priests and their duties and the people and their duties, and there are quite a lot of them, for example the 10 commandments, *Exo 20:12* ***Honour thy father and thy mother****: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. Exo 20:13 Thou shalt* ***not kill****. Exo 20:14 Thou shalt* ***not commit adultery****. Exo 20:15 Thou shalt* ***not steal****. Exo 20:16 Thou shalt* ***not bear false witness*** *against thy neighbour. Exo 20:17 Thou shalt* ***not covet*** *thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's*.

It's strange isn't it, that you thought the church duties ought to be conducted in a church, a building, but here are some of the Old Testament duties conducted in daily life, in a non-religious environment. It's exactly the same for the New Testament followers as they have the same rules to obey and it's not done in any formal religious setting. The church in the Old Testament and New Testament are the same so far.

The laws follow on in detail, take for example, *Exo 21:22 If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. Exo 21:23 And if any mischief follow,* ***then thou shalt give life for life, Exo 21:24 Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, Exo 21:25 Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.*** *Exo 21:26 And if a man smite the eye of his servant, or the eye of his maid, that it perish; he shall let him go free for his eye's sake*. This was the law for the church in the wilderness.

This Law is known as the Lex Talionis, or the law of retribution, and is otherwise known as an "eye for an eye". This is a bit spiteful you might think, plucking someone's eye out if your eye had been damaged as a result of an accident or

deliberately. But it wasn't, it was given to those men because they had hard hearts, and it was a statute of limitation upon the hard heart to stop them taking unlimited vengeance while getting some satisfaction. In this aspect, the church was behaving in an "earthly" manner, a fleshly manner, a carnal manner, and that differs from the church which has a spiritual manner.

You see, even under the Old Testament there was no obligation to take the others eye. People often read that law as being something that you have to do, whereas you can decide to do nothing. The spiritual person under the Old Testament could have let the matter go. Jesus says this in, *Mat 5:38 You know that you have been taught, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." Mat 5:39 But I tell you not to try to get even with a person who has done something to you. When someone slaps your right cheek, turn and let that person slap your other cheek*. CEV. Jesus is addressing the spiritual man, correcting the view of the natural man. And I point out again that this is happening under the Old Testament not the New Testament.

Taking one other example, that of divorce, *Deu 24:1 When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, **and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes**, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. Deu 24:2 And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. Deu 24:3 And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; Deu 24:4 Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance*.

The rule of the church in the Old Testament, the church in the wilderness had some very lax divorce laws such that you could put your wife away for a trivial reason, like "she doesn't please me" which could be any one of a hundred reasons, like she didn't put enough salt on your dinner, or the children were too noisy and she should have kept them quiet while you had a rest. But Jesus said, *Mat 5:31 It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: Mat 5:32 But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery*.

Mat 19:3 The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? Mat 19:4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, Mat 19:5 And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Mat 19:6 Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh.

What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. Mat 19:7 They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? Mat 19:8 He saith unto them, ***Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so****. Mat 19:9 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery*.

I reiterate that this is said under the Law of Moses, and it shows that the Pharisees had hard hearts, and behaved in a carnal manner, and that their following slavishly, the Law, did them no good whatsoever. If they put away their wives for these carnal reasons and married again, they were in fact committing adultery, and would be judged accordingly.

The churches of the Old Testament and the New Testament may divorce and remarry for trivial reasons, but that is because those people doing it are carnal, earthly and because of their hard hearts, they do not enter into the fullness of Jesus kingdom. The spiritual man will obey his Lord, Jesus and be welcomed into His kingdom.

Apart from the sacrifices, the Old Testament church and New Testament church have basically the same duties as individuals. We are to search the Scripture and meditate on all the things, reflecting on our attitudes to God and men, shining a light into the darkest recesses of our souls, cleansing ourselves of all unrighteousness, doing as the Apostle Paul does, *Act 24:14 But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: Act 24:15 And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. Act 24:16* ***And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men***.

The continuity of the church on earth is given in the similitude of the olive tree, and the Gentiles are grafted in to it, *Rom 11:24 It is not natural for a wild branch to become part of a good tree. But you non-Jewish people are like a branch cut from a wild olive tree. And you were joined to a good olive tree. But those Jews are like a branch that grew from the good tree. So surely they can be joined to their own tree again*. ERV.

This church or olive tree existed far earlier than the nation of Israel. It existed in the time of the patriarchs, before Moses because, *Rom 9:5 They have those famous ancestors, who were also the ancestors of Jesus Christ. I pray that God, who rules over all, will be praised forever! Amen*. CEV. It goes back to Noah, *Luk 17:26 And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son*

of man, whose day was the same as Jesus'. The olive tree was growing at the beginning of the world, the church existed from the beginning.

Is this "Church", this olive tree the elect or non-elect, the chosen one's or the ordinary people? I would say that it was **not the ordinary people**, the non-elect. It represents the spiritual people of God, and the reason I give is this, *Rom 11:21 For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Rom 11:22 Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, **if thou continue in his goodness**: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. Rom 11:23 And they also, **if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be graffed in**: for God is able to graff them in again*.

Look at the phrase, "***if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be graffed in***", that tells me that those in the olive tree are all believers and those broken off are unbelievers. All that are part of the olive tree are believers, and a part of Jesus true Church in the Heavenlies. This has implications for the dispensationalists who look for an earthly restoration of Israel, not a heavenly ingathering.

The church is firmly rooted in the Scripture and was planted in the beginning.

11..... The Character of Jesus as a Man

Preparatory reading: Colossians Chapter 1 v 15 - 23

When we started this series, I said that there was not a lot written describing Jesus, His outward appearance, His height, His colour, what He did during His youth, all the outward things which we would find interesting are not there. We don't find those things which we look for in a poster boy of masculinity. He does not seem to exist at all as far as this world goes. But isn't that exactly what we would expect from one who is God, who said, *Exo 20:4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Exo 20:5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me*;

God was not found in images made by man's hands, idols, He was indescribably magnificent, beyond imagination and only He would allow the images of Himself to be made, for example, in the furnishings of the Tabernacle, the types of Christ, about which we shall speak later. If God kept Himself cloaked in darkness, *Deu 4:11 And ye came near and stood under the mountain; and the mountain burned with fire unto the midst of heaven, with darkness, clouds, and thick darkness. Deu 4:12 And the LORD spake unto you out of the midst of the fire: ye*

heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice, He revealed much more in His inward character as a man than in His physical appearance, especially revealed as Jehovah Jesus in the New Testament.

These inward characteristics are not only seen in Jesus but are encouraged in us also*, Php 2:5* ***Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus***, and He is a role model for each and every one of us. Now the world in which we live must have meaning and purpose or else everything is lawless. If it is lawless, you can have any characteristic you want to attribute to yourself, because there are no moral absolutes. Good and evil only exist in a moral universe, under God, or else there is no such thing as good or evil. In such a world, without God, it is pointless to talk about honesty, decency, courtesy and compassion, for example for they are as meaningless as love and goodness. Who will define those attributes absolutely without declaring themselves to be god?

Yet we have today, some definitions of "Character", which assume certain things about this Creation without stating them and this leads to a variety of ideas as to what constitutes character. I will quote a few from different secular sources,

> Persons of character are noted for their honesty, ethics, and charity. Descriptions such as "man of principle" and "woman of integrity" are assertions of character. A lack of character is moral deficiency, and persons lacking character tend to behave dishonestly, unethically, and uncharitably.
>
> The definition of a real man is to have the ability to act as a leader in both social and professional situations, no matter the occasion. Instead of being a follower and simply going along with what other people are doing, a real man takes initiative and lets his actions speak for themselves.
>
> Courage Trustworthiness, including honesty, reliability, punctuality, and loyalty, Integrity, Respect and courtesy Responsibility, including accountability, diligence, perseverance, self-management skills, and self-control Fairness, including justice and freedom from prejudice Caring, including kindness, empathy, compassion, consideration, patience, generosity, charity, and interpersonal skills Good citizenship, including patriotism, concern for the common good and the community, responsible decision-making skills, and respect for authority and the law, School pride, gratitude

These are a "hotchpotch" of seeming virtues, given out, but denying the Giver of them, and no mention of God. They are not all of them Christian virtues, and they do not state what the Christian character consists of. That comes from the very nature and being of the unseen God who made man in His image, *Gen 1:27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them*.

There is an image of God, the character of God, which was given to man at his creation, which was lost at the fall into sin, and is restored in Jesus, *Php 2:5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus*. This image is based upon Jesus who created the world, *Joh 1:10 He was in the world, and* ***the world was made by him****, and the world knew him not*. At the creation, the decision to make a creature with the communicable attributes of God, namely man, was taken and implemented. When the Saviour came into the world that He had created, He brought with Him the true and undefiled image of God, the character of God and this is what we shall explore.

Jesus is the image of God, *Col 1:15 Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature*. If you want to know what God is like, Jesus can tell you, *Joh 1:18* ***No man hath seen God at any time****; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father,* ***he hath declared him****.* All the charlatans of the world who tell you that God is like this or like that, are deceivers and liars if they are not saying what Jesus has taught them, because nobody has seen God. We only know what God is like through what Jesus tells us, so when for example, Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, makes a pronouncement on what God says, and goes contrary to the Word of God, you can see he is only speaking from himself. Talking about the Anglican Church in Ghana, he said,

> "In Resolution 1.10, the Anglican Communion also made a commitment 'to assure [LGBTQ+ people] that they are loved by God and that all baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ."

You know Welby has not seen God because, *Joh 4:24 God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship him in spirit and* ***in truth****."* To say that God loves the LBQTXYZ community, when God Himself says He will judge them, is putting man's thoughts into God's words, *1Co 6:9 Don't you know that evil people won't have a share in the blessings of God's kingdom? Don't fool yourselves! No one who is immoral or worships idols or is unfaithful in marriage or is a pervert or behaves like a homosexual 1Co 6:10 will share in God's kingdom. Neither will any thief or greedy person or drunkard or anyone who curses and cheats others*. CEV.

The character of Jesus is seen in the new man, which the believer has put on, *Col 3:10 And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him*: This is something else we must do for Jesus, if we have repented of our sins, striven to enter in by the narrow gate, we must put on the new man, which I think parallels the development of the fruit of the Spirit. Rather than look at this characteristic in the new man, let's look at it in the perfection of Jesus.

What do you think is the most important characteristic of Jesus? I don't think that there is one. Let me clarify, there isn't one because they are all important. For example, you cannot have the quality of mercy without justice, they balance each other and the two go together in Jesus. Summarising God's Law we may say that the character of Jesus is summed up by the two Laws,

1. *Deu 6:5 And **thou shalt love the LORD thy God** with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might*
2. *Lev 19:18 Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but **thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself**: I am the LORD.*

Jesus confirms that all of the Law and the Prophetic teaching hang on these two commands, *Mat 22:36 Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Mat 22:37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. Mat 22:38 This is **the first and great commandment**. Mat 22:39 And **the second is like unto it**, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Mat 22:40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*

From these two Laws emerge the character traits of Jesus, and it follows, the Christian also. Let us start by looking at **how Jesus loves God the Father**, *Joh 8:28 Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. Joh 8:29 And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for **I do always those things that please him***.

This is a characteristic of Jesus, *Gal 1:10 For do I now persuade men, or God? or **do I seek to please men**? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ*. Jesus pleases the Father by doing the things that please Him, *2Co 10:5 overthrowing reasonings and every high thing that lifts itself up against the knowledge of God, and leading captive every thought into the obedience of the Christ*; Darby. Jesus came to do the will of God, not His own, *Joh 6:38 For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me*.

That means doing all God says, not just bits and pieces of what God says, the bits that please us, the things we want to do. It means emptying ourselves of everything so that we only have room for His will and that needs a conscious effort on or part to examine every part of our lives to see where we are not conforming to the will of God. It means examining what we believe and why we believe something. And the greatest test of what we believe is the Scripture, the very Word of God.

Jesus said, *Luk 18:17 Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein*. God does not want us to have an intellectual approach to His Word, it was not designed for clever disputes, it was not given for the worldly wise to tear in pieces, *1Co 1:19 As God says in the Scriptures, "I will destroy the wisdom of all who claim to be wise. I will confuse those who think they know so much." 1Co 1:20 What happened to those wise people? What happened to those experts in the Scriptures? What happened to the ones who think they have all the answers? Didn't God show that the wisdom of this world is foolish?* CEV.

We take the Scripture in the same manner as children. We believe God's Word to His children. We take it literally, when it says Adam, and we take Adam to have been a man just like us, not a myth, as Jesus says, *Mat 19:4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, Mat 19:5 And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?* When the Scripture speaks of Jonah, Jesus endorses it, and so He speaks, *Mat 12:40 For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*. Jesus doesn't argue with Scripture and neither do His children..

This characteristic of Jesus, obedience to God, shows itself in the acceptance of what is written, both before He entered the world and after He entered it, and He accepted it as historically true, and so He speaks of it as historically true, and does not dispute it or any other scriptures. He often prefixes what He is saying by, "it is written" or "have ye not read" and that is an end to all discussion. He never contradicts or gainsays the Scripture, and so we have an example in Him of the way we are to be.

Do the modern churches, denominations, cults, or sects follow the teaching of God as Jesus did? You can find out for yourselves by asking one simple question about any of their practices, government, structure of the ministry, quality of their faith, and it is, "is it in the Scripture?" Is it a principle of Biblical faith and practice, because if it cannot be found in Scripture, then you should not be doing it because Jesus didn't either?

Have you ever asked why churches are so keen to get you into Membership with them? There is not one word of this in the Bible, not one word about joining up with a worldly church. However, believers recognise believers, *Gal 2:9 And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me,* ***they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen****, and they unto the circumcision. Gal 2:10 Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do*. Notice that Paul and Barnabus did not join a church, but that they were recognised by the Apostles as having received the

grace of God, and were co-workers with the other Apostles. Paul and Barnabus did not seek membership.

You are already a member of the Church in view of what Jesus has done for you, a member of Christ's Church, *1Co 12:27 Now **ye are the body of Chr**ist, and members in particular.....Col 1:18 And he is the **head of the body, the church**: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence*. There is no need to join anything. If you are a believer you will find other believers and that is how the church is built up. This is just one of the ways men mislead you.

When the church forgets who is its Head, what it exists for, who it is to serve, then it forgets the principals of its head, and it suffers failure, *Col 2:18 Don't be cheated by people who make a show of acting humble and who worship angels. They brag about seeing visions. But it is all nonsense, because their minds are filled with selfish desires. Col 2:19 They are no longer part of Christ, who is the head of the whole body. Christ gives the body its strength, and he uses its joints and muscles to hold it together, as it grows by the power of God*. CEV.

Take the Laodicean church, *Rev 3:15 I know your choices. I know that you are neither on fire with love, nor do you appear cold with selfishness. I wish you were either on fire for my kingdom, or clearly opposed to it! Rev 3:16 But because you are a lukewarm mix of cold hearts practicing selfish methods while appearing to be on fire for my kingdom, you misrepresent me and make me sick to my stomach. I am about to vomit you out. Rev 3:17 You claim to be spiritually rich and full of heavenly treasure, thinking you have the truth and need nothing, but you are so self-deceived that you don't realize you are devoid of my character of love. You are decrepit, pathetic, bereft of true godliness, with minds so closed that you can't even comprehend truth.* Remedy. *You stand naked and exposed.* It is removed from its Head, Jesus and is suffering the consequences, because it will if it continues, be cast away.

To Sardis there is a warning, *Rev 3:3 Remember the Remedy you have received: accept it, apply it to your lives, and turn away from the ways of the world. But if you refuse to wake up to your condition and embrace the truth, you will be unaware of what is happening, and my coming will be like a thief's—you will not know the time I will come to you. Rev 3:4 **Yet you still have a few faithful people** in Sardis whose characters have not been stained with selfishness. They will walk by my side, dressed in the perfection of my character of love—pure and white—for they are healed.* Remedy. Only a few will be saved.

The churches must not think that everyone is treated the same, only the ones who have not defiled their garments. We should examine as much as possible, those who we regard as Christians, and those who we fellowship with, because if we let the unbeliever think that he is the same as us, we discredit the work of

Jesus, and the rot will set in the church. We should hold the high standards of Jesus and follow His example of doing the things which please God, or else prepare to be cast out of His presence.

This is the standard for all men, Jesus.

12.....The Character of Jesus as He Appeared to Men

Preparatory reading: Luke Chapter 13.

Jesus, as we have seen, was totally obedient to the Father and thereby set an example to all who would be called Christian. The next characteristic I want to look at is how Jesus interacted with people and what the example set by this is for us.

I would say that Jesus had no friends, that is close confidents, and the reason was, *Joh 2:23 And when he was in Jerusalem, at the passover, at the feast, many believed on his name, beholding his signs which he wrought. Joh 2:**24 But Jesus himself did not trust himself to them, because he knew all men**, Joh 2:25 and that he had not need that any should testify of man, for himself knew what was in man*. Darby. Jesus had a great insight into what men are, and we too would do better in life if we took His example and concentrated on what men actually are, instead of what we would like them to be.

Jesus saw men for what they were, fallen beings, who have sin as their operating system. Most people don't believe this, and even a large number of so called Christians, who espouse evolution and reject original sin are in the same mindset. Consequently they do not see men in the same way that Jesus sees them, *Mar 2:16 And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners? Mar 2:17 When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: **I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance***.

On the lookout for sinners, Jesus did not waste His precious time on the self-righteous, who were a lost cause to Him. He was not going to force the unrepentant into His kingdom, the men who did not see themselves stricken with sin did not need a doctor, but He was ever on the hunt for sinners. This led Him to many different houses to eat, *Luk 7:36 And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat*. But Jesus did not go to "parties", idle gatherings of unbelievers, whose aim was to get drunk and eat, and to use that modern phrase, "have a good

time”. You never see Jesus lingering over wine and bread to have a break from His ministry. Jesus went to these people to give them the Gospel.

Was Jesus boring? Yes, to some people He would have seemed boring, going on about the same old Gospel, always talking about God, always praying, always doing good, always talking about sin, always coming down on someone and telling them off. But I say this to the person who regards Jesus as boring, you have got your priorities all mixed up and it’s you who are boring, you who have you priorities wrong, you who have little interest in Him, and if you don’t see that, you have not seen how much you are embedded in satans’ camp. Jesus did what He did to rescue you and me, and for me that is not boring.

His presence was always at work, like when the woman was taken in adultery, although you never find her male consort, who could possibly run faster. Jesus could convict of sin by His presence, *Joh 8:7 So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. Joh 8:8 And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. Joh 8:9 And they which heard it,* ***being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last****: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst*.

I do not set myself up other than a vague shadow of our Lord, but I have had similar experiences. On business in Brighton, with one of my old bosses, I checked into a hotel for the night. We sat down for an evening meal, and scarcely had I picked up my fork, than he suddenly said to me, “you’re always talking about religion”. I was taken aback at this as I had not talked about Christianity to him once that day, so I asked him what I had said. He couldn’t answer me. But I suspect that he spoke out loud what he was thinking and that was the cause of his outburst. Sometimes we don’t have to say anything, but our conduct speaks for us or rather, Jesus speaks to the spirit of a man, without words.

Jesus seemed to gravitate towards the poor and needy, the desperate souls in this world rather than the comfortable and careless people. He did engage His ministry on a very small front, in one of the tributaries of the Great Roman Empire, and He engaged some seemingly ignorant and unlearned men such as, fishermen, a tax collector, a zealot and a thief. It was hardly an auspicious group or place from which to conquer the world.

His disciples didn’t appear to talk much with Him, and certainly there are no trivial conversations that are recorded. This is in part due to the fact that He does not engage in small talk, title tattle, or gossip, yet He was aware of what went on in the world, *Luk 13:2 And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? Luk 13:3 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all*

likewise perish. Luk 13:4 Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? Jesus had the knack of turning a news story into a lesson about salvation.

He never cracked jokes or was nasty to people, never made comments on their appearance, the way God had made them, or their disabilities. He was sometimes cynical or dry in His comments about people such as the Pharisees, *Mat 23:27 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Mat 23:28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity*. He was making a point by using a comparison that would have made them uncomfortable.

He was not led astray by foolishness or bad company and always took command of the conversations. He did not bully His way into conversations or enter a room with a "jokey" conversation, "hail fellow well met", He was not "loud" to get attention but was generally reticent to speak, unless someone engaged Him with a question. But when it was His desire He could preach so very succinctly without wasting His words. I suppose He could have had a motto, "if you have nothing to say, say nothing".

He didn't lead a great army of followers about, He didn't need them and His ministry is very much His own single handed application of the Gospel. He never engaged high level teachers, men experienced in the Law of Moses in His program of evangelism but was content to do the teachings Himself. At the same time, He was training the disciples, and we have seen they were not even believers in Him. The little band of followers were totally dependent upon Him, and as soon as He was executed, they fled.

This solitary figure was not without passion as we see, *Joh 2:14 And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: Joh 2:15 And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; Joh 2:16 And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise*. But His passion was for the sanctity of God's property. The will and work of God were constantly before Him.

Jesus was not a king who was so far above His subjects that they never knew Him. He was intimate with them, sharing their poverty, touching the lepers, healing the desperate, feeding the hungry, getting down and dirty, as we say, with the outcasts of the world. It is here where we see the outstanding traits of compassion, humility, empathy, kindness, love, self-sacrifice, sympathy,

humility, all brought into focus. The upside down kingdom of Jesus becomes the example for us, for whereas we seek to be great, He seeks the lowest position, *Luk 22:25 And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. Luk 22:26 But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. Luk 22:27 For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat?* ***but I am among you as he that serveth****.*

Jesus is almost a Robin Hood figure, taking the part of the poor against the power of the Synagogues, who resented His destabilising influence on the people. This account in Luke's Gospel shows His compassion, kindness, and gentleness in the face of opposition from the upholders of the Law, *Luk 13:10 And he was* ***teaching in one of the synagogues*** *on the sabbath. Luk 13:11 And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. Luk 13:12 And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. Luk 13:13 And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. Luk 13:14* ***And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day****, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day. Luk 13:15 The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? Luk 13:16 And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day? Luk 13:17 And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him.*

Jesus looses a woman from her 18 year long infirmity that bowed her together so that she could not lift herself up. Jesus does not call her to Him, "*he called* ***her to him***" as the KJV says, those words "her to him" are not in the original and the person translating the passage thought fit to include them to make the passage sound better. But Jesus did not call the poor woman over, and make her go through more agony, Jesus called to her and told her she was free from her disability. Jesus freed her by calling to her and going over and laying hands on her.

This healing occurred on a Sabbath, in the synagogue, not outside, and this woman was in the congregation. When the synagogue was founded in the days of the Second Temple, there was no separate women's section, nor any partition inside the physical structure. Therefore, according to the religious law of the time, women were required to sit and pray alongside the men. This woman's disability did not make her unclean otherwise she would have been kept

separated from the congregation, even Mary was ritually unclean after the birth of Jesus, *Luk 2:22 And when the days of her cleansing according to the Law of Moses were fulfilled, they took Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord*. LITV.

He was aware of her although to many she seemed bowed in prayer, and Jesus also recognised the fact the His mortal enemy, satan, had been the cause of her disability. In the middle of His teaching He called her to attention, and set her free, and it was something that everyone could see and there would have been a commotion caused this act. The ruler of the synagogue immediately rebukes Jesus for doing work on the Sabbath day. He makes observance of the Sabbath more important the losing of a daughter of Abraham, but Jesus rounds upon him for his hard heart.

Natural man finds it distinctly difficult to think outside of the box, the box in this case being the written laws of God. No wonder Jesus calls him a hypocrite, because that is just what the man is, it is not name calling, but a statement of fact, for he was a person who claims or pretends to have certain beliefs about what is right but who behaves in a way that disagrees with those beliefs, "*Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering".*

No wonder, "*all his adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him".* I don't think that Jesus was angry with the ruler of the Synagogue but disappointed in the hardness of heart that had covered the true goodness of the law. He had explained it to them all the depth of the command and some of them would go away and think about it. Either way, they would all appear again before Him on the Day of Judgement.

This example of the Man Jesus shows that the works that He did were complimented by His teaching. Jesus' attitude to the Law of God enables us to see His character as a man, and His character as a Man enables us to see His attitude toward God and His Law. The two are intertwined and are never separated. The woman in the synagogue enables the character of Jesus to shine through and at the same time teaches a lesson on the Law. The woman needs loosing from her oppressor just as the animal needs loosing from his oppressor, man. In a world of sin we all need releasing from this bondage and Jesus understands this.

The wonder is that He perseveres with us, but again, this shows the character of the man

13..... The Character of Jesus as Jehovah

Preparatory reading: John Chapter 10.

From briefly looking at the character of the man Jesus, we shall examine, DV, the divinity of Jesus. How strange you might think, that Jesus the man is also at the same time God, Jehovah Jesus. How can the two be true? Simply stated, "the two natures of Christ, in Christianity, the doctrine stating that Jesus, through the Incarnation, became fully human and fully divine and that these natures cannot be separated. The idea that "Jesus Christ is true God and true man" is also referred to as the hypostatic union and is a central tenet of Orthodox Christianity. Indeed, the Christian doctrine of salvation depends on the belief that Christ had to become fully human to share His full divinity with humanity."

There are many doctrines about the person of Christ which are heretical, and some of the modern sects have these as their core beliefs. I do not intend to confuse you with these errors, but look at what the Bible says and teaches. John's Gospel is a good place to begin our study as he concentrates on showing the Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God, *Joh 20:30 Jesus did many other miraculous signs that his followers saw, which are not written in this book. Joh 20:31 But these are written so that you can believe that* ***Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God****. Then, by believing, you can have life through his name.* ERV.

John gives us a number of instances that show Jesus, the Son of God, as having equality with the father,

> *Joh 10:27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: Joh 10:28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. Joh 10:29 My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. Joh 10:30 I* ***and my Father are one*****.**
>
> *Joh 5:16 And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day. Joh 5:17 But Jesus answered them,* ***My Father worketh hitherto****, and* ***I work****. Joh 5:18 Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father,* ***making himself equal with God****.*

The Jews held the view that the Father had ceased to work on the 7th Day, the Sabbath, but they, the Jews, had failed to see that the work would be continued by Jesus. It was not a mechanistic universe, which God had wound up as a spring and let go to run down, on its own with no intervention from Him, wound up on the creation days, and then left to run down by the Godhead. The work of sustaining the universe and redeeming man, causing the sun to rise on the just and unjust, was the work of the Son, Jesus, and He did not rest. So Jesus informs the Jews that the work of God is being done, now, on this Sabbath day, by the

authority of the Son. He was not breaking the Sabbath, but making the Sabbath what it was designed for, the good of mankind.

This rankled with the Jews, because in taking upon Himself the work of God, He was saying that He was equal to God, *Joh 5:16 And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day. Joh 5:17 But Jesus answered them,* ***My Father worketh hitherto, and I work****.*

Why not come straight out with it and say, "I am God"? Well He does, but I think this is one of those things that is lost in translation. Jesus uses the phrase, "I Am" 21 times in Johns Gospel, and **ἐγώ εἰμι** occurs 20 times in the context of Jesus. It is sometimes rendered "I am he", but the "he" has been put in there by the translator, and is not inspired. The words, **ἐγώ εἰμι**, "I Am", occur in the Greek Old Testament in, *Exo 3:13 And Moses said to God, Behold, I shall come to the sons of Israel and say to them, the God of your fathers has sent me to you; and they will say to me, What is His name? What shall I say to them? Exo 3:14 And God said to Moses,* ***I AM THAT I AM****; and He said, You shall say this to the sons of Israel,* ***I AM has sent me to you*****.**

The Hebrew uses the verb "to be" היה as describing God, אהיה אשׁר אהיה "I am who I am". It is from this sense of being, self existence, timeless existence, the name Jehovah came, יהוה, *Exo 3:15 And God said moreover to Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel: Jehovah* יהוה*, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you.* ***This is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations***. This is who Jesus is, Jehovah Jesus. This is Jesus in His human form, and Jehovah in His Divinity as we shall see.

I find it strange that we do not have a more straightforward translation of the words, "I Am", to bring the deity of Jesus into focus, because so many Christians miss this. Should we take these words, I AM and put Jehovah in their place? At Samaria, where Jesus first admits His Messianic role to the woman at the well, He says that He is the "I Am" who is speaking to her*, Joh 4:24 God is a spirit, and the ones worshiping Him must worship in spirit and truth. Joh 4:25 The woman said to Him, I know that Messiah is coming, the One called Christ. When that One comes, He will announce to us all things. Joh 4:26 Jesus said to her, I AM! the One speaking to you*. LITV. The core of the discussion with the woman at the well is that Jesus is greater than Jacob and He says so, *Joh 4:12 Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?*

Our Lord stills the tempest and comforts the disciples with these words, *Joh 6:18 And the sea was aroused by a great wind blowing. Joh 6:19 Then having*

rowed about twenty five or thirty furlongs, they saw Jesus walking on the sea. And He having come near the boat, they were afraid. Joh 6:20 But He said to them, ***I AM! Do not fear*****.** What does He mean? “I Am” what? It is a strange thing to say unless you see Jesus announcing Himself as Jehovah, *Jer 46:28* ***Fear thou not****, my servant Jacob,* ***saith Jehovah****: for I am with thee; for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have driven thee, but I will not make a full end of thee; but I will correct thee with judgment, and I will not hold thee altogether guiltless*. Jesus is saying to His disciples, “it is Jehovah, fear not”.

Here are some more examples where Jesus shows His Divinity, *Joh 8:23 And He said to them, You are from below; I am from above. You are from this world; I am not from this world. Joh 8:24 Therefore, I said to you that you will die in your sins.* ***For if you do not believe that I AM (***יהוה***), you will die in your sins***. This is saying that if you do not believe Jesus is the “**I AM**”, the self existent Jehovah, you will go to your grave a sinner.

The resurrection is not a “happening” without Jehovah, *Joh 11:25 Jesus said to her, “I AM* ***(***יהוה***)*** *the resurrection, and the life; he who is believing in Me, even if he may die, will live*; LSV. Paul expands this thought in a letter to Timothy, *1Ti 6:14 That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: 1Ti 6:15 Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; 1Ti 6:16* ***Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto****; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting.* Amen. Jesus alone has eternal life, and immortality.

Jesus is the one person whereby we get to God, *Joh 13:19 From this time I tell you before it happens, that when it happens you may believe that I AM* ***(***יהוה***)****. Joh 13:20 Truly, truly, I say to you, The one who receives whomever I may send receives Me; and the one who receives Me receives the One who sent M*e.

The question as to why Jesus’ caused men to go back and fall, is understood if He is Jehovah, *Joh 18:4 Jesus, therefore, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forward and said to them, "Who are you seeking?" Joh 18:5 They answered Him, "Jesus the Nazarean." Jesus said to them, "I AM."* ***(***יהוה***)*** *And Judas, who was betraying Him, was also standing with them. Joh 18:6 But when He said to them, "I AM,"* ***(***יהוה***)*** *they went backward and fell to the ground. Joh 18:7 Then He asked them again, "Who are you seeking?" And they said, "Jesus the Nazarean." Joh 18:8 Jesus answered, "I told you that I AM* ***(***יהוה***)****. Therefore, if you are seeking Me, allow these to go their way"*; AFV.

In the beginning of John’s Gospel he lays the foundation of life which is the Work of Jehovah Jesus, the Creator, *Joh 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Joh 1:2 The same was in the*

beginning with God. Joh 1:3 All things were made by him; and ***without him was not anything made that was made****. Joh 1:4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men. Joh 1:5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. Joh 1:6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. Joh 1:7 The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. Joh 1:8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. Joh 1:9 That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world*.

Jesus chooses to assume the title **Λόγος** or Word because it is the essence of all things that proceeded from Him. All of creation bears the marks of the Word in the very substance from which they are made, DNA the remarkable code of life is a language that is interpreted as man. The planets and stars conform to strict and universal laws, spoken by God, logical, and essential to the universe. It is like a stick of holiday rock with God's word running through it, showing the hand of the creator.
Jesus was the Temple of God, *Joh 2:18 Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Joh 2:19 Jesus answered and said unto them,* ***Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up****. Joh 2:20 Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? Joh 2:21 But he spake of the temple of his body*. He alone will raise it up, not man who destroyed it, and He will raise it to a greater state of glory than it ever had. Foolish men think a temple will be built by the Jews, but men who destroyed it will not build it, *Rev 21:22 And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. Rev 21:23 And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof*.

After the resurrection of Jesus, He appears to Thomas, one of His disciples, *Joh 20:27 Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. Joh 20:28 And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God*.

Without 20 centuries of learning and theological debate, this simple septic, saw Jesus for whom he was. He did not have the sophistry of generations, laying down their arguments and counter arguments as if they were forensic scientists, mulling over a body which they had dug up. Pointing to this and that which said this was God and this was not God, and bringing their wisdom of hindsight to the case.

Thomas lacked the sophistication of the wise, and this is shown in his lack of understanding of Jesus' ministry, *Joh 14:5 Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Joh 14:6 Jesus saith unto*

him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

It is also seen at the death of Lazarus, *Joh 11:14 Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead! Joh 11:15 I am glad that I wasn't there, because now you will have a chance to put your faith in me. Let's go to him." Joh 11:16 Thomas, whose nickname was "Twin," said to the other disciples,* ***"Come on. Let's go, so we can die with him."*** CEV.

This is rather enigmatic, ***"Come on. Let's go, so we can die with him."*** Some views of commentators are interesting,

> Chuck Smith: Now, he probably...you remember they said, "Lord, why do you want to go back there? The last time you were there they tried to stone you." And he's probably saying, "Lord, it's fool-hardy for you to go back there. They're going to kill you." And so, he's saying, "Well, if He wants to go back, well, let's all go back and die with Him." In other words, "We're heading towards our death," in a sense.
>
> Albert Barnes: **Die with him -** It has been much doubted by critics whether the word him refers to Lazarus or to Jesus. They who refer it to Lazarus suppose this to be the meaning: "Let us go and die, for what have we to hope for if Jesus returns into Judea? Lately they attempted to stone him, and now they will put him to death, and we also, like Lazarus, shall be dead." This expression, is supposed to be added by John to show the slowness with which Thomas believed, and his readiness to doubt without the fullest evidence. See Joh 20:25.
>
> Others suppose, probably more correctly, that it refers to Jesus: "He is about to throw Himself into danger. The Jews lately sought His life, and will again. They will put Him to death. But let us not forsake Him. Let us attend Him and die with Him." It may be remarked that this, not less than the other mode of interpretation, expresses the doubts of Thomas about the miracle which Jesus was about to work.

There does seem in Thomas, the view that this man Jesus, who they had followed, was not going to turn out the leader they had expected, but they were going to stick with Him, even if it meant their deaths. When Jesus was taken and they were not, a week later, Thomas saw his hope in the man dashed and that explained his scepticism about Jesus, and he needed proof before he would change his view.

Just what constituted proof to Thomas is seen by what he says, without time to think, with little theological background, this simple man blurts out the profound

truth that his heart has grasped. In a matter of seconds he had to respond. This is God, it must be so, for no one else could have possibly done such a thing.

We have seen the proof of the Godhead of Jesus from His own words, but now we see it from an ordinary man's point of view, and to Thomas there was no further need of any proof. This man Thomas is in his judgment more trustworthy than any of the men who have endeavoured to discredit Jesus as God, because he is there and he is part of the story.

14..... The Character of Jesus in His Youth

Preparatory reading: Matthew Chapter 8

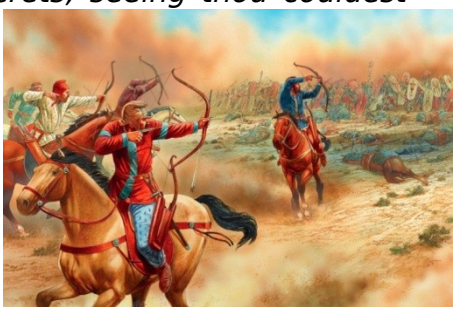
I will take us on a tour of "Jesus Seen through other eyes of men", from His birth to His ascension, and firstly, we look at two groups of men, the group of Gentiles and the group of Jews, namely the wise men and the shepherds.

I do not recall any baby as having such importance that He drew people to Him at his birth as did Jesus the Messiah. Not any of the great leaders of the world's religions, who also came from obscurity, were announced as to their arrival. This child was honoured at His birth as the Saviour of mankind, and before He had done anything, He was anticipated and worshipped as the deliverer. When most parents have a baby, other people just look at it and wonder why the parents are so enamoured over that wrinkled little soul, but beauty is in the eye of the beholder. When others look with genuine affection on the child, it must cause the parents to wonder why they see so much in him, and what it is that they see.

*Mat 2:1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men (**μάγος = magos**) from the east to Jerusalem, Mat 2:2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him*.

To the East of Jerusalem was the Parthian Empire from which came the Magi. It was the second of Persia's great empires and had briefly controlled Israel some 35 years before the birth of Jesus. Rome and Parthia were enemies. Their regional rivalry was characterised by war and conflict, with Israel literally caught in the middle. Members of Parthia's priestly class were called Magi. The Persian Magi were not only priests, but had knowledge of strategy, philosophy, and astronomy. It was a council of Magi that convened to select a new king for the empire. So, it was a council of Parthian king-makers, probably with armed guard, that arrived in Roman-occupied Jerusalem, asking to see the new-born King of the Jews.

Nebuchadnezzar was introduced to Daniel's God, Jehovah. *Dan 2:47 The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth it is, that **your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings**, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret.* It is around this time that the Magi, in their dual priestly and governmental office, composed the upper house of the Council of the Megistanes ("magistrates") whose duties included the absolute choice and election of the king of the realm. **The Magi were Kingmakers not Kings**! The Magi determined the future rulers of the great Parthian Empire. It was a huge responsibility.



There were Parthians present at Pentecost, *Act 2:9 **Parthians**, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia*. The Parthians were great warriors. They had heavy cavalry, Cataphracts and light cavalry who were mounted archers. They could inflict injury at a distance with their compound bows, 400metres I am told. They could fire a shot over the flank of their steed as they moved away from their enemy. This was known as the Parthian shot, or as it has come to be known, the parting shot.

Why am I telling you all of this? It is because the Magi, the intellectual elite of Parthia would not have travelled alone, they would have had a military escort. They were too valuable to lose. It has been suggested that the number of Magi that came to Jerusalem numbered at least 8 and that the escort would have numbered at least a 1,000 elite soldiers. They were no doubt travelling in full force with all their oriental pomp, riding Persian steeds (rather than camels). They were a force to be reckoned with.

It was no small delegation of "three wise men" riding on camels, it was a small army investigating an astronomical phenomenon of epic proportions. It was a Gentile enquiry into the king of the Jews. The phrase "**the king of the Jews**" is not used again until the crucifixion of Jesus, *Luk 23:38 And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, **THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS***.

The king was born in Bethlehem, *Joh 7:42 Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was?* This was the town where David, as a young man learned his occupation as a shepherd, *1Sa 17:15 But David went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem*. It was here David was prepared for the task of leading the nation of Israel, *2Sa 7:8 Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I took thee from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel:*

The skills that David had learned as a shepherd came to the forefront in his fight with the Philistine Goliath, *1Sa 17:32 "Your Majesty," he said, "this Philistine shouldn't turn us into cowards. I'll go out and fight him myself!" 1Sa 17:33 "You don't have a chance against him," Saul replied. "You're only a boy, and he's been a soldier all his life." 1Sa 17:34 But David told him: Your Majesty, I take care of my father's sheep. And when one of them is dragged off by a lion or a bear, 1Sa 17:35 I go after it and beat the wild animal until it lets the sheep go. If the wild animal turns and attacks me, I grab it by the throat and kill it. 1Sa 17:36 Sir, I have killed lions and bears that way, and I can kill this worthless Philistine. He shouldn't have made fun of the army of the living God! 1Sa 17:37 The LORD has rescued me from the claws of lions and bears, and he will keep me safe from the hands of this Philistine. "All right," Saul answered, "go ahead and fight him. And I hope the LORD will help you."* CEV.

In this little town of David was to be born, the shepherds Shepherd, the chief Shepherd, Jesus, *1Pe 5:2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 1Pe 5:3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. 1Pe 5:4 And when* ***the chief Shepherd*** *shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away*.

So it fulfilled the prophecy, *Mic 5:2 You, Bethlehem Ephrathah, are too small to be included among Judah's cities.* ***Yet, from you Israel's future ruler will come for me. His origins go back to the distant past, to days long ago****. Mic 5:3 That is why the LORD will abandon Israel until the time a mother has a child. Then the rest of the LORD's people will return to the people of Israel. Mic 5:4 The child will become the shepherd of his flock. ⌞He will lead them⌟ with the strength of the LORD, with the majestic name of the LORD his God. They will live in safety because his greatness will reach the ends of the earth*. GW.

These shepherds at Bethlehem were more than just "poor shepherds", lying down with their sheep, they were evangelists, making known the fulfilment of the word of God, concerning the child, *Luk 2:16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. Luk 2:17 And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. Luk 2:18 And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds*.

We have two witnesses to the birth of the Messiah, one Gentile and one Jewish. The Magi, Gentiles, saw His testimony written in the sky, *Mat 2:2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him*. I think that they saw the "star" in their country which was to the east of Israel. But stars rise in the east (northern hemisphere) and set in the west, so if it was a normal star, it would have been moving each day, and

how could you determine which way to go, for whatever it was you expected to see? You would walk towards the east in the evening and by the end of the night you would have turned around and been heading west, and then in the daylight you would have nothing to guide you.

Was it a heavenly body, a star, that the Magi saw or some celestial phenomenon which caused them to search their libraries of knowledge? The ancients kept records, prophecies, events, histories, for somewhere in the past might be a key to the present events, *Ezr 4:15 That search may be made in the book of the records of thy fathers: so shalt thou find in the book of the records, and know that this city is a rebellious city, and hurtful unto kings and provinces, and that they have moved sedition within the same of old time: for which cause was this city destroyed*.

Were these Magi prompted to search the ancient record for the meaning of the "star" and did they find it in the ancient Hebrew Scriptures? *Num 24:17 "I see him coming, but not now. I see him coming, but not soon.* ***A star will come from the family of Jacob. A new ruler will come from the Israelites.*** *He will smash the heads of the Moabites and crush the heads of all the sons of Sheth*. ERV. They did not see in the Scripture the birthplace of Bethlehem for some reason, but went to the City of David, Jerusalem to enquire, *Mat 2:2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. Mat 2:3 When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him*.

Herod, by now an aging ruler with "chronic kidney disease complicated by a very uncomfortable case of maggot-infested gangrene of the genitals", suspicious of his sons motives for ruling, paranoid about his legacy, slowly dying (it would be only four years and he would be dead), that he sought the priests and scribes for answers, *Mat 2:4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. Mat 2:5 And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, Mat 2:6 And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel*.

The Magi heard what was said without hesitation and went to Bethlehem. They did not once doubt the Scripture, they weren't critical of the text, they didn't doubt the literalness of the text, they went from Herod, and the star again picked up with them and guided them to their destination, *Mat 2:9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was*. *Mat 2:10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.* They came, they saw, and possibly because of Herod's paranoia, were warned by God to go

back by a different way, *Mat 2:12 And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way*.

The shepherds received their revelation of the birth, by a messenger, *Luk 2:9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid*. After a speech from the messenger, in the glory of the Lord which lit up the Judean hills around them, they were treated to a heavenly choir, and as this strange phenomenon drifted back to heaven, darkness again descended upon them. Fear quickly turned to boldness, and they went to Bethlehem, saw the Messiah child, evangelised the people and disappeared into history.

The Magi and the shepherds saw the child and they left, they just came to see Him and did nothing more than that, why? So that God could call them forward on the Day of Judgement as having seen and born witness to the birth of His Messiah. The men who would come in later years and say it was not true, it was a myth, it was a fairy story will be confounded by their testimony and condemned as liars. Because we have the Bible, we have God's witness, we have their testimony now, but to the unbelieving they have nothing.

Shortly afterwards, Mary had undergone her ritual cleansing, in Jerusalem, and a man whose name was Simeon (he may have been young or old, we do not know) comes up to Mary and Joseph and gives then a prophecy, *Luk 2:25 And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. Luk 2:26 And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ*.

His words formed a song, Nunc dimittis, and is from the initial words of the Song of Simeon in Latin, which mean "now let depart." The song is identified as the canticle for Evening Office by the Apostolic Constitutions of the late fourth century, *Luk 2:29* ***Lord, now lettest thou thy servant*** *depart in peace, according to thy word: Luk 2:30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Luk 2:31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; Luk 2:32 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel*.

It too acknowledged the place of the Gentiles in the coming salvation of God, just as the Magi had done in honouring Jesus. It is almost a sigh of relief from this man, as he is released from the word of God, *Luk 2:25 At this time a man named Simeon was living in Jerusalem. Simeon was a good man. He loved God and was waiting for God to save the people of Israel. God's Spirit came to him Luk 2:26 and told him that he would not die until he had seen Christ the Lord.* He has seen it all now, and there is nothing more for him to see, for he has seen the Messiah child.

He has a wonderful attitude. In that moment of gazing down into that babies eyes, he saw the fulfilment of his dreams and that of the nation of Israel and the Gentiles. What was there now to keep him in this world? It all faded into nothing now that he had seen Him, family, friends, life on earth, it was as nothing compared to this precious jewel that he had found. Let me go over the river that I may enjoy His presence forever.

The Jew looked upon the baby Jew, and somehow he knew the here, in the ordinariness of life, in a city where others shared in the birth of their own child, this was the infant he was looking for. He embraces Him totally, because he has found Him. How many of the so called Christians show such service and devotion, that they would go to be with Jesus after one sighting of Him. No excuses, no delays for this or that, because the world will be left, be left safe with Jesus, and you can go to your rest in peace. Those who think that they are essential for this world to operate have not got confidence in Jesus.

I do not know what Joseph and Mary thought of all the attention that their new born baby had received. It was a great joy now, but there was a hint of trouble to come, *Luk 2:33 And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him. Luk 2:34 And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; Luk 2:35 (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed*.

15.. . The Character of Jesus the Story of His Revealing

Preparatory reading: Luke Chapter 2.

We continue to look at the people who came face to face with Jesus and how they responded to Him. One more voice we hear from a meeting with the new born child, Jesus, and that was Anna the prophetess, *Luk 2:36 Now Anna, a prophetess, was also there. She was a descendant of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher. She was very old, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, Luk 2:37 and then as a widow for 84 years. She never left the Temple, but continued to worship there night and day with times of fasting and prayer. Luk 2:38 Just then she came forward and began to thank God and to* ***speak about Jesus to everyone who was waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.*** ISV.

Some have put her age at 100 years plus, but this did not diminish her zeal for the Lord as she came to the Temple to serve God, not in the inner sanctum that

was for “men only” but in the court of the women. This meeting came straight on the heels of the meeting with Simeon. I have chosen the ISV, the International Standard Version, because it seems to me to be a correct translation. Anna, having seen the baby speaks to everyone “*waiting for the* ***redemption of Jerusalem****”,* not as the KJV, “*spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem*”. I know it uses the preposition ἐν, but it can be rendered of.

My reason for this is that the events are obviously taking place in Jerusalem, as it says in Luke 2:22, so where else would Anna speak to the people but in Jerusalem. This is tautology, repetition, and besides this, the people were not looking for redemption, loosing of oppression, only in Jerusalem but in all Israel. Jerusalem on this earth was doomed, finished, and the New Jerusalem was the City that men looked to, *Gal 4:26 But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.* Jesus’ mission was to free or loose the captives, to start the new Exodus, *Luk 9:31 Appearing in glory, they spoke of* ***His Exodus****, which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem*. LITV.

This was as Anna prophesied, “*the redemption of Jerusalem*.” The word redemption comes from the root word to loose, and it is used in John, *Joh 11:44 And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them,* ***Loose him, and let him go***. Just as Lazarus was loosed from the clothes that bound him in the grave, so Jerusalem would be loosed from the oppression of sin, *Rom 8:21 Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into* ***the glorious liberty of the children of God***.

Anna too was an evangelist who spoke to all about this, and the four which we have spoken of so far, all acknowledged Jesus as Saviour, although He was a baby, and all must have been convinced in themselves that this was the chosen one. So convinced was Anna, that this child was the One, she “*spake of him”* to all who came to her.

There is one more group that we acknowledge saw Jesus in His youth, and we find them in the Temple at Passover, when He was 12 years old, *Luk 2:46 And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. Luk 2:47 And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers…….Luk 2:52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.*

Just how He introduced Himself to the great men of the Law, and what they saw in Him that made them invite Him into their “midst” is not said, but we must infer that they saw something quite amazing, and a person with charm and potential. He was not just asking them questions but giving them astonishing

answers, and as He grew in stature He grew in wisdom. But most of all He was viewed favourably by the people He interacted with.

Jesus was similar to Moses in that He knew He was a deliverer, but His time had not yet come, as with Moses, *Act 7:25 (He thought that his own people would understand that God was going to use him to set them free, but they did not understand.)* GNB. And it was with that spirit of self-discipline, that He patiently bore the long years until the time was ripe for Him to be unveiled. Like the instruments of the Tabernacle of Israel, they were only known as to their form from Scripture. The ordinary Israelite never saw the glory of the instruments of the Tabernacle, only the Coverings.

Num 4:5 When the camp is supposed to move, Aaron and his sons will go in and take down the canopy that hangs over the ark containing the words of God's promise. First they will cover the ark with the canopy. Num 4:6 Over this they will put a covering of fine leather. On top of that they will spread a cloth made entirely of violet material. Then they will put the poles in place. Num 4:7 "They will spread a violet cloth over the table of the presence and put on it the plates, dishes, bowls, and pitchers for the wine offerings. The bread that is always in the LORD'S presence will also be on it. Num 4:8 They will spread a bright red cloth over everything on the table. They will cover all this with fine leather. Then they will put the poles in place. Num 4:9 "They will take a violet cloth and cover the lamp stand, as well as the lamps, tongs, trays, and all the containers for the olive oil used in the lamps. Num 4:10 Then they will put the lamp stand and all its utensils under a covering of fine leather and put them on a frame to carry them. Num 4:11 "They will spread a violet cloth over the gold altar and cover the cloth with fine leather. Then they will put the poles in place. Num 4:12 "They will take all the articles that are used in the holy place, put them in a violet cloth, cover that with fine leather, and put them on a frame to carry them. Num 4:13 "After they take the ashes away, they will spread a purple cloth over the altar. Num 4:14 Next, they will put all the accessories used at the altar on it. These are the trays, forks, shovels, and bowls-all the altar's accessories. They will spread a covering of fine leather over all this. Then they will put the poles in place. Num 4:15 "When Aaron and his sons have finished covering the holy things and the camp is ready to move, the Kohathites will come to carry all the holy articles. They must never touch the holy things, or they will die. The Kohathites will carry all the things from the tent of meeting. The objects were simply seen by faith, not by sight.

All this is bubbling underground or was forgotten in the intervening 18 years between going up to the Temple at Passover and the announcement of His ministry. There were many Israelites who did expect the coming of the Lord and they prepared themselves, as John the Baptist prepared the way, *Luk 3:3 And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; Luk 3:4 As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias*

the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Luk 3:5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; Luk 3:6 And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

Why did the people go to John, what was it about him that gave him credibility and that he was not just another one of those mystics? What is it that makes us follow him? It could be that you wanted to play safe and get on the right side of the Lord but without changing your ways, but John immediately puts them right on that matter, he doesn't court popularity and he says things that will put people off coming to the Lord, *Luk 3:7 Crowds of people came out to be baptized, but John said to them, "You bunch of snakes! Who warned you to run from the coming judgment? Luk 3:8* ***Do something to show that you really have given up your sins****. Don't start saying that you belong to Abraham's family. God can turn these stones into children for Abraham. Luk 3:9 An ax is ready to cut the trees down at their roots. Any tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into a fire." Luk 3:10 The crowds asked John, "What should we do?" Luk 3:11 John told them, "****If you have two coats, give one to someone who doesn't have any. If you have food, share it with someone else****." Luk 3:12 When tax collectors came to be baptized, they asked John, "Teacher, what should we do?" Luk 3:13 John told them, "****Don't make people pay more than they owe****." Luk 3:14 Some soldiers asked him, "And what about us? What do we have to do?" John told them, "****Don't force people to pay money to make you leave them alone. Be satisfied with your pay****." Luk 3:15 Everyone became excited and wondered, "Could John be the Messiah?"* CEV.

It is interesting that in preaching the Gospel, John does not fear causing offence, he calls the people "snakes". He is not a slippery Joe preacher, who will flatter his audience, and cover them with so much grease that they slide into the kingdom without effort. John makes it a hard birth for those who truly repent. None the less, many came in and many were washed in the Jordan, and they awaited the coming King. Many trusted John's word without having seen Jesus, which is a testament to his preaching.

Having not seen his cousin for 30 years, John is unsure of Him, although he is sure of his task as the forerunner, the Elijah who was to come, *Joh 1:32 And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. Joh 1:33* ***And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me****, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost*. John looked at Jesus and knew this was the Greater One, washing the people, not with water only, but with the Holy Spirit and he relinquished his task in favour of Jesus. Like Simeon, John could say, *Luk 2:29 Lord, now lettest*

thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: Luk 2:30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation.

Jesus starts His ministry by calling His disciples, *Mat 4:18 And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. Mat 4:19 And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men*. We often think that this call came out of the blue to Peter and Andrew, supposing that they had not seen Jesus before, but did it? Jesus came to live in Capernaum, *Mat 4:12 Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee; Mat 4:13 And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim*. I have also suggested that in the course of His earthly employment, Jesus would have met the locals, Peter included.

The town where the brothers originated from was Bethsaida, a few miles to the north east of Capernaum, which sits on the lake of Galilee, *Joh 1:44 Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter*. But it says that Jesus came to Peter's house in Capernaum, *Mat 8:14 And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever. Mat 8:15 And he touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose, and ministered unto them*. This property probably came to Peter by marriage, hence it mentions "*wife's mother"* who lived in the house. Jesus had access to this house, so He knew the mother in law.

There was something compelling about Jesus on this day, and the words "follow me" were almost hypnotic to them, *Mat 4:19 And he saith unto them, **Follow me**, and I will make you fishers of men. Mat 4:20 And they straightway left their nets, and followed him*. They gave up their means of living, to become fishers of men with Jesus, they saw in Him the "gatherer" of men, *Mat 3:12 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.....Mat 3:16 And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: Mat 3:17 And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*. This was an opportunity to do great things and the disciples trusted Jesus with their lives.

The calling of the disciples continued, *Joh 1:43 The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, **Follow me**. Joh 1:44 Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Joh 1:45 Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, **We have found him**, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. Joh 1:46 And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of*

Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. Joh 1:47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!

They found Jesus and He found them and they were equally enthusiastic. They also had no idea what they were going to do following Jesus, apart from becoming "fishers of men", but they were compelled by some invisible hand to leave behind their lives and go on with Jesus. I suppose that it is just like us. We hear the calling, "follow me" and we say "yes", but do our lives "follow" or do we stop dead? Jesus did not call them and let them get on with their own lives, He called them to follow, to be disciples, to share hardships, to share the triumphs and the sorrows with Jesus, to accompany Him on His death march.

We do not see discipleship the same today as they did in Jesus day. Today it is centred around the church rather than Jesus, and it is a partial commitment to following Him and the rest of the time is your own, and Christianity is compartmentalised by this approach. But I get the impression that discipleship was a full time occupation, whose values seeped into every corner of life. You had to have some employment, but you were employed to earn your food so that you could serve your king. As John taught, "be content with your wages", and as Jesus taught, "seek first the kingdom of God". This world counts for little, and has value only in as far as it contains God elect. The rest of it, the world we know, will be cremated on the Day of Judgement when it is completely destroyed. We have the opportunity to become worthy of His name, and worthy disciples, by using what time we have left, following Him.

16..... The Character of Jesus as Healer

Preparatory reading: Ephesians Chapters 4 and 5.

We continue looking at Jesus' interaction with man and how they viewed Him. We now come to a particular group who we would designate the sick, the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. This group was comprised principally of the Jews who had no other means of help, and generally they were the burden on society, not only outcast because they could not work, but also because under Jewish law, they were deemed unclean.

Illness and disease are just one of life's downsides, but today we are most fortunate in having various remedies for them, so that we do not consider most of them as seriously obstructing our progress. We do not even bother to thank those who make life more bearable. In the days of Jesus life was hard as this article by the University of Queensland shows,

The Levant enjoyed a mostly healthy climate, the people had frugal but healthy diets and general hygiene principles were vigorously applied and practiced. Uncleanliness was believed to be the basis for all diseases and ailments. The practice of cleanliness and hygiene is frequently cited throughout the Bible and many of the tractates of the Talmud were handbooks on hygiene, pharmacopoeias and medical encyclopedias.

"*Hygiene and prophylaxis became religious dogma intended for the welfare and preservation of the nation. Of the 613 commandments,* ***213 are of a medical nature****.....frequent washing, care of the skin, strict dietary and sanitary regulations.....these and other provisions inhibited the spread of many of the diseases prevalent in neighbouring countries.*"

One only needs to look at 'Leviticus' which explains, in great detail, the way in which households and personal items that have come into contact with a carrier of leprosy, should be cleaned. 'Leviticus 13' also explains the different forms of leprosy and how each one can be identified and treated.

And yet the people still suffered from ailments, maladies and disease. Sudden changes in temperature from day to night could induce ailments such as pneumonia or the common cold. Occasional hot, heavy weather especially accompanied by the dreaded *'khamsin'* or strength draining desert wind also correlated with an increase in dysentery. Dust storms could cause a number of maladies of the eyes; and the marshy regions (especially around the Jordan) were teeming with malaria-carrying mosquitoes.

'*The Old Testament mentions some fifty diseases, from itch to apoplexy, consumption to gout, exanthema to peritonitis. The New Testament also refers to a great many: paralysis, dropsy, piles, blindness, deafness and of course leprosy....*'

I imagine it is very much the same in India. I saw a programme recently on the "Railway Hospitals" that they use in the rural areas. The authorities announce that a train will be coming to a region, and that they will treat certain diseases. So for two weeks they have a hospital for eye problems, then some time later a two week programme helping people with walking problems, and another clinic dealing with cleft palates, and so on. A specialist team does dozens of operations and the villagers almost swamp the medical services.

There was a never ending stream of patients just like in Jesus day, *Mat 4:24 And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people*

that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them..... Mat 14:14 And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick. .....Mar 6:55 And ran through that whole region round about, and began to carry about in beds those that were sick, where they heard he was. Mar 6:56 And whithersoever he entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment: and as many as touched him were made whole.

Did everyone that was healed thank Him, believe in Him and follow Him after they were healed? No they did not! Although one case is given in Scripture, I reckon that there were many more, *Luk 17:15 And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, Luk 17:16 And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. Luk 17:17 And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? Luk 17:18 There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. Luk 17:19 And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole*.

Nine of the lepers did not return to give glory to God, but went on their merry way. But the one who returned and gave glory received a bonus, "*thy faith hath made thee whole"* or more correctly, "**your faith has saved (σώζω) you".** This little insight suggests that not everyone who was physically healed was spiritually healed, and for the healing to work a lasting miracle, faith in Jesus was necessary.

The people came to Jesus for different reasons, and not all of them wanted to hear Him, but the stuck it out because there was something for them at the end. It's something that I have seen a lot of in Africa, and I am sure a lot of people could be gathered for any purpose providing there was a handout at the end. The only major contribution that I experienced was arguing about how much allowance they would get. With Jesus, they followed Him for food, *Joh 6:26 Jesus answered, "I tell you for certain that you are not looking for me because you saw the miracles, but because you ate all the food you wanted*. CEV.

Some really did see that Jesus was a powerful ruler, and that He operated His Kingdom like a military unit, *Luk 7:2 And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die. Luk 7:3 And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. Luk 7:4 And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying,* ***That he was worthy for whom he should do this: Luk 7:5 For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue****. Luk 7:6 Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I*

am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof: Luk 7:7 Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. Luk 7:8 For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. Luk 7:9 When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. Luk 7:10 And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.

The Lord adds, *Mat 8:11 And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. Mat 8:12 But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*.

This was extraordinary, a gentile soldier who sought a blessing from Jesus a Jew, as Nathan C. Johnson observed,

> "A Gentile had no inherent right to ask the Lord for any good thing. He could "earn" that right, however, by blessing God's people, and thus identifying himself with them. This would mean that he would have the right, based on his blessing of God's people, to ask to receive part of the blessings they were receiving. That is what the centurion did. The Syrophoenician woman, however, had not blessed Israel, and thus was like the rest of the Gentiles who had no right to ask. She had to establish a right then, and she did that not by blessing Israel but by receiving a word from God and responding to it with faith".

The centurion probably knew the verse, *Gen 12:2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and* ***I will bless thee****, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: Gen 12:3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.* He had blessed the people with a place to worship but this was the least among the things he would be remembered for. He was a great faith, "*I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel"*, and that is God saying to the Jews, that they did not come near to this gentile in faith.

How did the Roman exhibit a "greater faith" than Israel? It was by acknowledging the authority of Jesus, *"For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it".* Jesus was running everything, yes, everything in the universe, as He said in John's Gospel, *Joh 5:17 But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work*. The Roman had seen Jesus' Godhead, and that whatever He said came to pass. Just by His Word alone, He could summon disease to relinquish its hold, because He

was a master of it, He could control disease and the universe, *Exo 4:10 And Moses said to Jehovah, Ah Lord! I am not eloquent, neither heretofore nor since thou hast spoken to thy servant, for I am slow of speech and of a slow tongue. Exo 4:11 And Jehovah said to him,* ***Who gave man a mouth? or who maketh dumb, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? have not I, Jehovah?*** Darby.

The centurion knew how the world worked, and you did not break the order of working without destroying the fundamental order of the universe. The Roman knew he was but a small cog in a big machine, but he saw in Jesus, the owner of that machine, and in seeing that, in extrapolating from the lesser to the greater, he had shown his faith. Israel on the other hand had been living under God for so many years, that they had become too familiar with God. They saw His authority as being their authority, they had become equals, and there was no order or ability in them, *Joh 8:39 They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. Joh 8:40 But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. Joh 8:41 Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. Joh 8:42 Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. Joh 8:43 Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word*. We shall examine the religious upstarts later.

This is very important for the Christian to see, because he does not consider his life to be as rigid as the centurion, he doesn't see rules as being written to be strenuously obeyed, he doesn't see duty as the soldier did. But he is misguided to think he can play fast and loose with the rules, for by so doing he is making himself a rebel and denying Jesus' rule over him. There can be no place in the kingdom of God for such a person. The rules are His rules, and authority starts from Him, going through the husband, to the wife, to the children and servants. Obedience is shown to the officers God has put in His rank, and men, women, and children are part of God's order. Paul sums it all up in his letter to the Romans, *Rom 13:1 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Rom 13:2* ***Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation***. That is why the centurion had the greatest faith, he saw Jesus as Jehovah God.

Jesus often found Himself in conflict with the religious authorities over His acts of healing, *Mat 9:2 And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. Mat 9:3 And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. Mat 9:4 And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? Mat 9:5 For whether is*

easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? Mat 9:6 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.

The first thing that Jesus says to the man is, "*Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee"*. What connection could there have been between his palsy, παραλυτικός = paralutikos, paralysis and his sin? Not necessarily any connection, because we are all sinners, and the state we are in is not always due to sin, *Joh 9:2 Jesus' disciples asked, "Teacher, why was this man born blind? Was it because he or his parents sinned?" Joh 9:3 "No, it wasn't!" Jesus answered. "But because of his blindness, you will see God work a miracle for him*. CEV. Jesus saw in this man "faith", the desire to be rid of his past sins, and it was so in the case of the former blind man and the former paralytic.

The story goes much deeper because it didn't matter whether Jesus said, "your sins are forgiven" or "get up and walk", both were true, so it didn't matter what He said. Anyway, He said what He did because, "*that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins*", and He did it because certain scribes had said in their heart, not even openly, that Jesus was committing blasphemy.

So we have here two types of people, the genuine followers and the griping whinging scribes, who were not rejoicing to see the man healed, but said that Jesus committed an offence by saying He had power on earth to forgive sins. The stupid scribes did not stop and think that if Jesus was working a miracle and forgiving sin that He must have Divine authority, or else it would not have happened and got the Father's seal of approval.

The last thing I want to look at is what Jesus' family thought of Him, *Mat 13:53 When Jesus had finished telling these stories, he left Mat 13:54 and went to his hometown. He taught in their meeting place, and the people were so amazed that they asked, "Where does he get all this wisdom and the power to work these miracles? Mat 13:55 Isn't he the son of the carpenter? Isn't Mary his mother, and aren't James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas his brothers? Mat 13:56 Don't his sisters still live here in our town? How can he do all this?" Mat 13:57 So the people were very unhappy because of what he was doing. But Jesus said, "Prophets are honoured by everyone, except the people of their hometown and their own family." Mat 13:58 And because the people did not have any faith, Jesus did not work many miracles there.* CEV.

I think that this event occurred at the Nazareth Synagogue, where they questioned where Jesus got His wisdom from. They thought that He was an ordinary person, just like them, an ordinary technician, besides there were His mother, brothers and sisters, so He must be an ordinary man. They did not see

through the veil of the flesh to the Godhead. It may be implied, though it is not clear that His family were of that opinion also. Familiarity breeds contempt and that is just what they showed Him.

17..... The Opposition of Jesus Toward Bigotry

Preparatory reading: 1 John Chapter 2.

We now come to the most contentious people that Jesus spoke to and these were the religious people. I do not find any atheists at the time of Jesus and it seems as if they all believed in “god”, although that is such a broad term it can mean anything. Paul even came across an altar to the “unknown god” in Athens, *Act 17:23 As I was going through your city and looking at the things you worship, I found an altar with the words, "To an Unknown God." You worship this God, but you don't really know him. So I want to tell you about him*. CEV.

Everyone has a concept of “god” and it is something that they as individuals have woven together from various sources, *Joh 4:21 Jesus said to her: Believe me, the time is coming when you won't worship the Father either on this mountain or in Jerusalem. Joh 4:22 You Samaritans don't really know the one you worship. But we Jews do know the God we worship, and by using us, God will save the world. Joh 4:23 But a time is coming, and it is already here! Even now the true worshipers are being led by the Spirit to worship the Father according to the truth. These are the ones the Father is seeking to worship him*. CEV.

You occasionally hear the phrase, “I’ve got my beliefs”, as a rebuke to people trying to impose some alternative religious belief upon them. Churches are full of people giving out advice on how to worship God, but they seldom change their personal view on how to worship. It makes me think that the way they worship “god” is an invention of the particular mindset that the particular group or denomination or sect, want to believe in, and has been converted by them into a denomination. It is a pattern of belief and practice that they feel comfortable with and that suits them, despite their inability to find any justification for it in Scripture. As Job sarcastically observed of his companions, *Job 12:2 No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you.*

The religious people, the Pharisees, the scribes, the Sadducees, the priests, all well respected people you might think, all having been schooled in the religion of Moses and the traditions were somehow above the ordinary man, who we looked at previously, *Luk 18:10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. Luk 18:11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, **I thank thee, that I am not as other men** are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican*. The religious elite were in the know, full of knowledge and the guardians of truth, supposedly.

These leaders had sorted out religion, they had “dotted the I’s and crossed the T’s” so to speak. They had it all worked out, down to the finer points, they were God’s chums, they spoke to Him in knowledge, or so they thought, but in reality, “*The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself”.* Does it remind you of yourself? You take the Scriptures and instead of being moulded by them, take the Scriptures and mould them into whatever shape you want them to be, justifying your own actions. Instead of being reformed you become deformed, and before you know it, you have made your own brand of Christianity. This unwillingness to be transformed by scripture and Jesus lies at the heart of the problem with the religious elite of Jesus day, and much of the church today, and that explains why Christianity is so different now from that of the churches of the 1st century.

If I were to ask you a question, “what is the difference between your church, and say the Anglicans, or the Baptists, or the Jehovah’s Witnesses, etc”, how would you answer? Are you trying to justify your position and your beliefs as opposed to the others? What if your church has got 90 per cent of the Christian doctrine correct, and the Jehovah’s Witnesses 50 per cent right (I may have the figures wrong, and it may be the other way around) are you satisfied that you are more correct than the other’s? But what is there which stops you examining the missing doctrines, the percentage for which you are in error? Is it your stubborn unbelief and trust in the word of men that stops your exploration of the truth? All the systems of men, without exception are error filled, and there is no league table of errors.

There is a most urgent need to get out of indoctrination by men, *1Jn 2:26 I am writing to warn you about those people who are misleading you. 1Jn 2:27 But Christ has blessed you with the Holy Spirit.* ***Now the Spirit stays in you, and you don't need any teachers****. The Spirit is truthful and teaches you everything. So stay one in your heart with Christ, just as the Spirit has taught you to do*. CEV. Now I know God put teachers in the church, but they have their limits, being human, and you and I as individuals need to find the truth by the Spirit, and I think that this is why we are told that we do not need teachers, because of God’s anointing. You have an individual responsibility because you will answer on judgement day, not as a group who you can hide behind, but as an individual. Hence the words of Jesus, “**follow ME**”, are of utmost importance.

The thing that the religious leaders of Jesus day did was that they had stopped learning God’s way and had supplemented what they thought was right, with man’s ways, and they did not help ordinary people, *Mat 23:13 But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!* ***for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men****: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.* They weren’t always wrong, and Jesus had some words of advice on their teaching, *Mat 23:1Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, Mat 23:2 "The scribes and the Pharisees teach with Moses'*

authority. Mat 23:3 So be careful to do everything they tell you. But don't follow their example, because they don't practice what they preach. GW.

This was another thing that Jesus observed of these religious “experts”, they were good at doling out instruction but very poor at following it themselves. There is a word, ὑποκριτής = hupokritēs, used to describe them, and it means an actor, one who has assumed a character. They had assumed the character of a pious man but they were inwardly corrupt, *Mat 23:27 "How horrible it will be for you, scribes and Pharisees! You hypocrites! You are like whitewashed graves that look beautiful on the outside but inside are full of dead people's bones and every kind of impurity. Mat 23:28 So on the outside you look as though you have God's approval, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness***.** GW.

Hypocrisy is one of the things which lets religion down and is an irritant to good men, *Isa 65:5 They said, "Stay away! Don't touch me! I'm holier than you are." They have become like smoke in my nose, like a smoldering fire all day long. Isa 65:6 "Look! It is written in front of me. I will not be silent, but I will repay. I will repay you in full*. GW. This passage by Sam Rainer of “Church Answers” states the case.

> In one sense, we’re all hypocrites because none of us live up to our own standards. We’ve all heard the claims about how the church is full of hypocrites. It’s easy to dismiss these complaints as unfair. We shouldn’t. Your attitude and actions should match your belief. Jesus expressed concern over religious hypocrisy. In Matthew 6 and Luke 11, He denounces hypocritical givers, hypocritical prayers, hypocritical fasting, and hypocritical judgmentalism, among others. Jesus was tired of the false piety of the Pharisees, specifically how they used religion to leverage power. Christian hypocrisy occurs when you make yourself the priority over God. Often, hypocrisy is an accusation levelled at a particular person. But churches can become hypocritical and cultivate a culture of hypocrisy as an organization. How does this happen?
>
> 1. **The church becomes fixated on external preferences and not internal devotion**. This kind of hypocrisy occurs when we elevate our preferences to the level of Scripture and lower others’ preferences to the level of sin. Church preferences never saved anyone. Let’s keep the main thing the main thing. (an example of this is the way you dress or how much makeup you wear)’
>
> 2. **The church falls in love with commitment but neglects people**. Jesus condemns the Pharisees for loving *what* they were doing more than *why* they were doing it. They loved the system more than the people they were supposed to serve. Commitment is important. Commitment that neglects people is hypocrisy.

3. **The church leaders seek religious prominence instead of humble service**. Church leaders who feed off the attention of others will face the temptation to raise their own names above that of Christ. Serving people in a way that glorifies God requires humility.

4. **The church hides double standards with artificial religious rules**. Well-intentioned rule-followers can be swept into hypocrisy. Artificial rules can hide double standards, but they also confuse the message of the gospel.

5. **The church kills the heart of worship with a religious presentation**. What Abel gave to God was an acceptable offering because it reflected the true heart of worship. What Cain gave to God was not acceptable because it was a religious presentation. And what happened next? The hypocritical brother killed the worshiping brother. The heart of worship is complete surrender to King Jesus, not a religious presentation.

6. **The church adds to the gospel to burden people**. Religion becomes a barrier to salvation when the church adds rules to the gospel as a prerequisite for salvation. Nothing is more hypocritical than burdening people with the false gospel of legalism. When salvation is a moving target, the church becomes a vehicle for oppression.

One of the main antidotes to hypocrisy is a culture of repentance. When people live out repentance, hypocrisy becomes much less of a problem in the church. Frankly, on this side of heaven, a perfect church would be a crushing burden. You would ruin it the moment you joined! You don't need a perfect church. You need a perfect Saviour. The church is called to be *authentic*. Ultimately, hypocrisy dies when a church becomes sold out for the good news of Jesus.

I would go further than that author and say that hypocrisy is without doubt, the chief sin of the person who calls himself religious. The seven deadly sins were first compiled by Pope Gregory I around the year 600 and are:

1. Lust 2 Tim 2:22
2. Gluttony 1Cor 10:31
3. Greed Heb 13:5
4. Sloth Prov 6:6
5. Wrath Rom 12:19
6. Envy Prov 14:30

7. Pride Jer 9:23-24

But there are far more than 7 sins that are deadly and the overarching sin is hypocrisy, for it sits high at the table and it says, “I do not lust after anything”, but you do, for discontent with anything is lust. Hypocrisy says, “I am not a glutton”, while devouring anything that belongs to someone else. Hypocrisy says, “I never get angry”, while you fight for position in life and over others. Hypocrisy says,”I am not proud”, while being very proud of that. These sins can all be committed on the inside without men seeing them. The Pharisee congratulated himself before God that he had none of those things, *Luk 18:11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. Luk 18:12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess*. What an absolutely perfect man, what a hypocrite!

Towards the end of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus appears to lose His patience with these people, *Mat 23:13 But **woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees**, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.....Mat 23:14 **Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees**, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.....Mat 23:15 **Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees**, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.....Mat 23:16 **Woe unto you, ye blind guides**, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!.....Mat 23:23 **Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees**, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.....Mat 23:25 **Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees**, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.....Mat 23:27 **Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees**, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.....Mat 23:29 **Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites**! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous*

We do not see the reality, that **WE** are those persons, that we are the very people that we despise, we think all other churches are wrong and that we are the only ones going to glory, but we are blind to our failures and deaf to the truth. Instead of the religious leaders going their own way, instead of us making it up as we go along, we must go back to the Word of God and implement that in our lives.

Does God continuously intervene when, as Christians we go astray, make poor decisions, make mistakes on how we should worship, how we should govern our lives, no the Lord appears not to stop us in anyway whatsoever. The Lord is silent to our prayers in most cases, and doesn't give us direction. This is either because He has given up on us and doesn't want anything to do with us, or because He has given us the instructions that we need to follow and He is not going to repeat Himself. I think that it is the latter, and He is not going to repeat Himself. He has told us exactly what to do and if we do not do it, we risk our lives on the Day of Judgement.

If we are hypocrites and those men in ancient time got called hypocrites by Jesus, it is because we go our own way. Do you think with the "Woes" hanging over them, that many of the Pharisees, the Scribes, the Sadducees, the priests made it into the kingdom? No, I don't think it was many and I wonder how many in this generation will make it.

18..... Jesus and Faith

Preparatory reading: Matthew Chapter 15 verses 21 to 28.

What is faith? Is it something we generate **in ourselves** or is it something generated **in us**? As a young Christian, I was taught that I could generate faith in myself, and that certainly seemed to be the case from what Jesus said, *Mat 17:19 Later the disciples went to Jesus in private and asked him, "Why couldn't we force out the demon?" Mat 17:20 Jesus replied:* ***It is because you don't have enough faith!*** *But I can promise you this. If you had faith no larger than a mustard seed, you could tell this mountain to move from here to there. And it would. Everything would be possible for you.* CEV*.* If I had enough faith, if I had the faith as small as a mustard seed, I could move mountains.

Well, increase our faith say the disciples, but the disciples get a cryptic answer, *Luk 17:5* ***And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith****. Luk 17:6 And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you*. If I had the faith, as small as a grain of mustard seed, I could move trees. Its powerful stuff this faith but "what it is", as opposed to "what it does", eludes us.

Faith is like taking a small piece of material, a grain of uranium for instance, and within that nucleus is all the potential energy to move a mountain, to become a nuclear source of energy that when released, it would shift a rock. One gram of uranium 235, if converted to energy would be equivalent to 20 million kilograms of TNT. That's a big bang.

That is an analogy of faith, but what is faith actually? Well, it comes from hearing the Word of God, *Rom 10:17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*. Yes, but that's how it comes but not what it is. How about this, *Heb 11:1 Now faith is the essence of things being hoped, the evidence of things not having been seen*. LITV. That is faith's work in the soul, faith at work, but again not what faith is.

This is getting closer, *Eph 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God*: Faith is the principle by which we are saved by grace. This is **saving faith**, and there are other types of faith, like blowing up mountains or throwing trees into the ocean. This faith works in you to produce salvation, and it is a gift from God to you. You might be tempted to boast that it was your faith that saved you, but you cannot, because it is, *Eph 2:9* ***Not of works****, lest any man should boast. Eph 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them*.

The faith that has saved us is not a work of man, it is a work of Him who has recreated us in Jesus, to walk in good works that God has set out for us to walk in. We are not talking about "being saved. Amen". We are talking about being saved and doing something, being enabled to walk in Jesus "good works". While the clowns are debating whether it is "faith" or "grace" that saves, we see why we are saved and there is something we must do and not debate, "*we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in".*

There is the faith in action, to heal, but it has as its object Jesus, as you will recall in the story of the centurion, *Mat 8:8 The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof:* ***but speak the word only****, and my servant shall be healed. Mat 8:9 For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. Mat 8:10 When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you,* ***I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel****. Mat 8:11 And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. Mat 8:12 But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*.

The centurion was appealing to Jesus to "***speak the word only***", and that was why Jesus said, "*I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel*". **The centurion's faith was in Jesus**, He was the object of faith, He was the one to be believed, no one else, *Heb 11:6 But without* ***faith*** *(πίστις = pistis) it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must* ***believe*** *(πιστεύω = pisteuō) that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek*

him. Faith **IN** and believing **ON**, are the same thing. Here is a better translation of that verse, *Heb 11:6 No one can please God without **faith,** for whoever comes to God must **have faith** that God exists and rewards those who seek him*. GNB.

The faith in Jesus was founded on good soil, for the centurion must have heard of the God of Israel since he had built a synagogue for the Jews, *Luk 7:4 And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: Luk 7:5 For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue*. I think that the centurion had based his thoughts on the Word of God*, Gen 2:4 These are the histories of the heavens and the earth, when they were created, in the day that Jehovah Elohim made earth and heavens*. Darby. He knew that when God said, it happened, *Gen 1:3 And God said, Let there be light. And there was light*. He knew that Jehovah Jesus could order all things with a Word of God.

Some people say that "faith" is the confidence in a thing happening or not happening, such as, if I sit on that chair, it will not break and cause me to have an accident. They say, I am exercising faith by sitting on it. I do not think that this is faith, but it is experience, built up over time by repeated testing, that that chair has never failed to support you. But biblical faith is much more, (although a continuous exercising of faith, may lead to a confirmed experience). Biblical faith doesn't use sight, it does not use its eyes, prove whether or not something will be, *Heb 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for**, the evidence of things not seen**.*

Taking the analogy of the chair, suppose if you never seen a chair before, if you had never tested one, if you had never know what weight it would take, then you could say, if you had received some directive from God to sit on it and you would be alright, that you had exercised faith by sitting in it. It would be done by "***the evidence of things not seen".*** It would be total trust in God.

Here we must clarify the situation further, with respect to "God", *Joh 1:18 No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.* God has a face and He is Jesus, Jehovah Jesus. We are exercising faith or if you like belief, by hearing the word of Jesus, and not hearing anything else, certainly not man.

Look at this faith in practice, *Mat 9:20 And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched **the hem** of his garment: Mat 9:21 **For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole**. Mat 9:22 But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said**, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole**. And the woman was made whole from that hour*.

The woman had come to the end of doctors and they couldn't help her a bit. Suddenly after twelve years she saw clearly that "***If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole***". I do not know why she thought this because no one else had done it and it was an untested method of being healed. She didn't think in her soul, "if I get near to Jesus, I can ask Him to heal me", but she did think of touching His garment. And it was the right thing to do because Jesus said, "***Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole***".

Jesus attributes the woman's faith to her, but she looked to Jesus, or at least His garment, to be healed. Something had moved her to this action, and I suggest that it was a word from the Lord, *Rom 10:17 So faith comes from hearing the message, and the message that is heard is what Christ spoke.* GW. It could have been motivated from her knowledge of Scripture, *Num 15:37 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Num 15:38 Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and* ***that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue****: Num 15:39 And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that* ***ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the LORD****, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring: Num 15:40 That ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God.*

There was in the woman a desire, conscious or otherwise, that the clue to a cure for her malady, lay in Jesus garment, and in touching the hem of it, which was a reminder of the teachings of God. The separation of the woman from God is now turned to reconciliation through Jesus. She believed Jesus, and in a similar state of inability as Abraham, *Rom 4:19 Abraham's faith never became weak, not even when he was nearly a hundred years old. He knew that he was almost dead and that his wife Sarah could not have children. Rom 4:20 But Abraham never doubted or questioned God's promise. His faith made him strong, and he gave all the credit to God. Rom 4:21* ***Abraham was certain that God could do what he had promised****. Rom 4:22 So God accepted him,* CEV. Their faith in God enabled them to be certain of God's Word.

The Syrophoenician woman is another example of faith in action, *Mat 15:21 Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of* ***Tyre and Sidon****. Mat 15:22 And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. Mat 15:23 But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying,* ***Send her away; for she crieth after us****. Mat 15:24 But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Mat 15:25 Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. Mat 15:26 But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs* (κυνάριον = kunarion = puppies)*. Mat 15:27 And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs*

which fall from their masters' table. Mat 15:28 Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, ***great is thy faith****: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.*

The hard hearted disciples wanted to move this gentile woman on, but she was having none of it. The puppies eat the crumbs that fall from the table of the master, surely you can do this “crumb” of kindness for me. And He did, because of her great faith, but where had her faith come from? Perhaps because she lived in Tyre and Sidon, she was familiar with the story of Hiram King of Tyre, who also like the woman, was a gentile, yet he was instrumental in helping Solomon build the Temple of God, *2Sa 5:11 And Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, and carpenters, and masons: and they built David an house*. The woman had knowledge of Scripture, and she knew how to apply it, and that constituted faith. Moreover Hiram was instrumental in building the Temple and as we have seen, the Temple was a “type” of Jesus.

The disciples struggled with “faith” and from the beginning and Jesus calls them “little faiths”, ὀλιγόπιστος = oligopistos, perhaps because they only believed in part. When they went on the sea, which they knew well as fishermen, they unusually became afraid, *Mat 8:24 a terrible storm suddenly struck the lake, and waves started splashing into their boat. Jesus was sound asleep, Mat 8:25 so the disciples went over to him and woke him up. They said, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" Mat 8:26 But Jesus replied, "Why are you so afraid?* ***You surely don't have much fai****th." Then he got up and ordered the wind and the waves to calm down. And everything was calm. Mat 8:27 The men in the boat were amazed and said, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him."* CEV.

A second miracle on the sea also occurred to them while sailing, with this footnote, *Mar 6:51 And he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered. Mar 6:52* ***For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened***. The hard, obdurate heart, stopped them from understanding the miracle on the waters, it inhibited their faith, it stopped Jesus from being seen and the Word having effect. They could not see that here was God with power to still the waves and feed the multitudes.

Then came the blind men, seeking their sight, *Mat 9:28 And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord. Mat 9:29 Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you. Mat 9:30 And their eyes were opened; and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See that no man know it.* As another blind man said, *Joh 9:32 Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind*. The blind men had no experience of sight, this healing was unknown and they were unseeing, showing that faith does not require sight.

Alright says Jesus, according to your faith so be it. And according to their faith they saw. What else could they trust except Jesus word, and so He healed them.

All faith centres in Jesus and His words, as this example shows, *Mar 11:20 As the disciples walked past the fig tree the next morning, they noticed that it was completely dried up, roots and all. Mar 11:21 Peter remembered what Jesus had said to the tree. Then Peter said, "Teacher, look! The tree you put a curse on has dried up." Mar 11:22 Jesus told his disciples:* ***Have faith in God****! Mar 11:23 If you have faith in God and don't doubt, you can tell this mountain to get up and jump into the sea, and it will. Mar 11:24 Everything you ask for in prayer will be yours, if you only have faith*. CEV.

"***Have faith in God***" was all that you had to do to get faith. It explains why church history is not littered with examples of exploding mountains or the seas being covered in trees, why everyone isn't healed, why the poor are always with us, because we do not have Jesus directing His universe by the input of man. Everything come from the directives of Jesus, and if He wants a mountain blown up by faith, He will indicate to you that He wants it so, and if He doesn't, you will not do it.

You may not have the faith to blow up mountains, but you have been given faith to believe in Jesus, haven't you, *Joh 9:25 He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see*. Faith is Confidence in Jesus.

Thank you Jesus!

19..... Jesus and the Commandments

Preparatory reading: Exodus Chapter 20 and Romans Chapter 7

The Law is not separate from God. I mean by that, it is not something that the Lord imposes on man randomly, because he is a creature, and nothing more than that. The Lord could have made man jump through many hoops because He is God and remained separate from man, but it is not remote control over mankind that God seeks. He seeks a servant who will serve Him honourably and it is God's way, the way of holiness.

""Holiness" is commonly defined as being separate or set apart. God is holy in that He is set apart from everything that is not God, and God's people must be holy by being set apart from sin. Holiness according to this definition is separateness that entails moral purity." God set Israel apart as a nation and in doing so, called them to holiness, *Exo 19:6 And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of*

*priests, and an **holy nation**. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel*. They were to have the same holiness which characterised God, *Lev 20:26 And **ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy**, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine*.

God was going to sanctify the people or make the people Holy, and He does this by imparting to them His Word, *Joh 17:17 Make them holy in the truth. **Your word is truth***. TLV. Martin Luther recognized that **the Word** of God brings a different kind of healing through the Law and Gospel. **"Law"** describes **what God requires**. It demands perfection: a standard we cannot meet. **"Gospel"** describes **what God provides** so that we may live.

Expressed another way, "**the law** is the written scripture e.g. **the commandments,** while **the word** is the revealed scripture which is Christ himself. **The law condemns while the word saves**. The law justifies by requirements which are hard to fulfil while the word justifies by faith of Jesus Christ". For example, *Rom 6:22 But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto **holiness**, and the end everlasting life. Rom 6:23 **For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord***.

We will be judged by the Law, "the wages of sin", because the Law states the terms and conditions of our conduct, *Rom 2:12 Those people who don't know about God's Law will still be punished for what they do wrong. And the Law will be used to judge everyone who knows what it says. Rom 2:13 God accepts those who obey his Law, but not those who simply hear it. Rom 2:14 Some people naturally obey the Law's commands, even though they don't have the Law.* CEV.

One of the reasons Jesus came was to uphold the law, but also to graciously give us hope, as Luther said the, **"Gospel" describes what God provides so that we may live**", *Mat 5:17 Don't suppose that I came to do away with the Law and the Prophets. I did not come to do away with them, but to give them their full meaning. Mat 5:18 Heaven and earth may disappear. But I promise you that not even a period or comma will ever disappear from the Law. Everything written in it must happen. Mat 5:19 If you reject even the least important command in the Law and teach others to do the same, you will be the least important person in the kingdom of heaven. But if you obey and teach others its commands, you will have an important place in the kingdom. Mat 5:20 You must obey God's commands better than the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law obey them. If you don't, I promise you that you will never get into the kingdom of heaven.* CEV.

Jesus did not come to deliver us from the law, the curse of the Law, by annulling the Law, *Mat 5:17 **Think not that I am come to destroy the law**, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. Mat 5:18 For verily I say unto you, **Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled***. He came to uphold the Law and as

such was the only man ever to have kept it, and was by this the perfect sacrifice of the Lamb of God. He delivers us by fulfilling the Law.

Has any man kept the law other than Jesus? No they have not, *Rom 3:23* ***All of us have sinned*** *and fallen short of God's glory*. That is, every man from Adam, through the nation of Israel, through the Exile, and through the New Testament, failed to keep the law because sin prevents him from keeping it. So we are left with a problem, we are told that we must keep the law, but we know that we cannot keep the law. How do we get out of this dilemma?

The Law is often thought of as being without grace, carnal, pharisaic, hard, and unyielding but this is all wrong. The Law is heavenly, from God, it is spiritual, *Rom 7:14 For we know that* ***the law is spiritual****: but I am carnal, sold under sin*. We are the carnal ones, we are graceless and we are pharisaical when dealing with the Law. The law is spiritual and holy, *Rom 7:12 Wherefore* ***the law is holy****, and the commandment holy, and just, and good*. It is when something good and holy, gets into the hands of sinful men that it can change dramatically. When something spiritual, the Law, comes down from God, from heaven, it loses that Divine ability to work good, because it has fallen into the hands of sinful men.

The Apostle explains further, *Rom 7:15 In fact, I don't understand why I act the way I do. I don't do what I know is right. I do the things I hate. Rom 7:16 Although I don't do what I know is right, I agree that the Law is good. Rom 7:17 So I am not the one doing these evil things. The sin that lives in me is what does them.* CEV. This thought of man's duty, his inability to do his duty, is stated in the book of Deuteronomy, ***Deu 10:16 Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked***. The solution is found in the Lord, *Deu 30:5 and Jehovah thy God will bring thee into the land that thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers. Deu 30:6* ***And Jehovah thy God will circumcise thy heart****, and the heart of thy seed, to love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live*. Darby.

What is impossible for men to do, Jehovah Jesus does, *Col 2:14 He did this by erasing the charges that were brought against us by the written laws God had established.* ***He took the charges away by nailing them to the cross*****.** GW. So what did Jesus do, did He take them away by His death and leave nothing in their place? By no means, *Heb 8:10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and* ***write them in their hearts****: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:*

As part of the process of forgiveness, Jesus takes away the penalty for sin, takes way the ordinances and handwriting that were against us, gives us an obedient

heart, and this is the important part, He brings us into a new relationship to the law, **He writes it on our hearts**.

So we obey the law by virtue of the fact that we are hidden in Jesus, and are “in-lawed to Christ”, *1Co 9:20 And I became to the Jews a Jew, that I might gain the Jews: To them that are under the law, as if I were under the law, (whereas myself was not under the law,) that I might gain them that were under the law. 1Co 9:21 To them that were without the law, as if I were without the law, (whereas I was not without the law of God, but was in the law of Christ (**ἔννομος= ennomos**,) that I might gain them that were without the law. 1Co 9:22 To the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak. I became all things to all men, that I might save all*. DRB.

The law, as we have shown was of little effect because of sin, *Rom 8:3 The law was without power because it was made weak by our sinful selves. But God did what the law could not do: He sent his own Son to earth with the same human life that everyone else uses for sin. God sent him to be an offering to pay for sin. So God used a human life to destroy sin. Rom 8:4 He did this so that we could be right just as the law said we must be. **Now we don't live following our sinful selves. We live following the Spirit.*** ERV. It is Jesus who makes it possible to be righteous, if we are “in-lawed” to Him.

It works like this, *1Jn 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: 1Jn 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. 1Jn 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 1Jn 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1Jn 1:10 If we say that we have not sinned, **we make him a liar**, and his word is not in us*.

That says that if you have your mind set upon this world and its evil ways, no matter how much you protest that you serve Christ, you are deceived, you are a hypocrite and the truth is not in you. If you have your mind set upon the truth, you walk in the light, *Joh 1:4 In him was life; and **the life was the light of men***, and if you walk in that light, you have fellowship and cleansing from Jesus. To guard against the hypocrite who says, “I don’t have any sin”, a caveat is added, we as a result make Jesus a liar and His Word is not in us. If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us, and clean us from all unrighteousness.

We remain sinners as long as we are in this world. But to set your mind on Jesus, to walk in the light, means we have forgiveness. I might say that as we walk through this sewer of life, Jesus as it were stops the muck falling upon us, He holds the umbrella up against the pollution and sin. Those who say that they

don’t have sin, get no protection from Him and just increase the amount of pollution that falls upon them. We are **in-lawed** to Jesus and so are protected.

The Law also has another purpose and that is to lead us to Jesus. I started by saying “The Law is not separate from God”, it was connected to Him with a purpose, *Gal 3:24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster (παιδαγωγός) to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. Gal 3:25 But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. (παιδαγωγός)*. A παιδαγωγός = paidagōgos, or pedagogue, is a Greek word meaning “boy leader” or a “child minder”. He was often a slave who led the master's children to school, and had the charge of them generally. This article explains further, “The Role of the Pedagogue in Galatians”, by Michael J. Smith (Liberty University),

> In English the word "pedagogue" refers to a teacher, but the Greek word does not have that meaning. Like the word "tutor," the rendering "schoolmaster" in the King James Version is also misleading. The παιδαγωγός "was distinguished from the didáskalos (teacher), for he gave no formal instruction but administered the directives of the father in a custodial manner—though of course indirectly he taught by the supervision he gave and the discipline he administered." It would seem reasonable, therefore, that a better translation for παιδαγωγός is "custodian," since the word "tutor" is too closely associated with the idea of formal teaching.....
>
> The role of pedagogues probably varied from family to family and culture to culture, but all seem to have had certain responsibilities in common. As a constant companion to the child, the pedagogue escorted the child to and from school, carrying books or other objects, sometimes securing an education for himself in the process. He took the child to athletic practice, oversaw his meals, made him do his homework, protected him from harm, and supervised his social engagements. Twenty-four hours a day the pedagogue accompanied the child in virtually every activity of life.
>
> Plato also recalled a conversation between Socrates and the young boy Lysis, in which Socrates asked, "Someone controls you?" Lysis replied, 'Yes, he is my tutor [παιδαγωγός] here." "Is he a slave?" Socrates queried. "Why, certainly; he belongs to us," responded Lysis, to which Socrates mused, "What a strange thing, (I exclaimed); a free person controlled by a slave!"
>
> The Law was α παιδαγωγός in that it had a temporary function. One of the most obvious aspects of the pedagogue-child relationship in any culture is that it was temporary. "While the young master was a child he differed not at all from a slave. [When he reached maturity],

> however, the pedagogue's dominance ended, and the young man became master de facto and not simply de jure." Xenophon described the actual arrangement with the pedagogue: "When a boy ceases to be a child, and begins to be a lad, others release him from his moral tutor [παιδαγωγός] and his schoolmaster: he is then no longer under a ruler and is allowed to go his own way." The pedagogue-child relationship was not permanent, although a different kind of relationship developed at times, based on friendship and respect.
>
> With the coming of Christ the supervisory function of the Law ended, just as the services of a pedagogue ended when his charge comes to maturity. Any endeavour on the part of a son who has reached maturity and come into possession of his inheritance to revert back to the supervision of an administrative guardian would be a reversion to childishness, it would be a return to what Paul calls "the elemental teachings/principles of the world" (ta stoicheia tou kosmou). For when God moves forward in his redemptive economy, any reversion or standing still becomes a "worldly" act, no matter how good or appropriate such a stance once was.

So then, the Law was a temporary custodian of the Jewish people giving guidance on morals until Jesus came along. It was a pedagogue, a house slave, bringing up the freeborn son of the household. We are not to understand this as a phase which each Christian **now** goes through before coming to Jesus. It is not a developmental stage where we transition from a caterpillar to a butterfly in our Christian growth. It served a purpose in history, it was for that period alone and now that purpose is done away with. The Law had its place among Jews until the time when Jesus came and since then, the whole focus is upon Jesus.

All Law is subsumed in Jesus whom we serve in the spirit.

20..... Jesus and Fasting in the Old Testament Part 1

Preparatory reading: Leviticus Chapter 16.

This study is in 3 parts. I must admit, I have always found the subject of fasting a difficult one and more so when I was a new Christian. I was taught that it is something that a Christian should do but it doesn't say when you should do it, and there is no rule in the New Testament about how many times a year you should do it, and whether you do it on your own or as a group of Christians. In his book "Hunger for God," John Piper writes: "Christian fasting, at its root, is the hunger of homesickness for God. Christian fasting is not only the spontaneous effect of superior satisfaction in God, it is also a chosen weapon against every

force in the world that would take that satisfaction away." If that is the case we should be continually fasting.

Jesus is recorded as fasting at the beginning of His ministry, *Mat 4:1 Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. Mat 4:2* ***And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights****, he was afterward an hungred*. It seems that this was a supernatural fast, 40 days and nights, recalling Moses, when he fasted, *Exo 34:27 And the LORD said unto Moses, Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel. Exo 34:28 And he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments*.

This type of fast is extremely rare. It was showing the sincerity and dedication to the task in hand. Everything else, even life itself was put on a lower level of importance than the tasks for which they now engaged. It must have been aided by God to give them the power to live under such a long term fast.

Fasting is superficially like the Sabbath day where you give up your own pleasure and delight in the Lord, *Isa 58:13 If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Isa 58:14 Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.* With fasting you give up the pleasure of food to concentrate on a task, but on what task?

Jesus and His disciples did not fast, as long as they were together on earth, *Mar 2:18 And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say unto him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not? Mar 2:19 And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. Mar 2:20 But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days*. It does imply that you do not fast when you are glad but **when you are sad**.

The first account of fasting is on the institution of the Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur, *Lev 16:29 And this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month,* ***ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all****, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you: Lev 16:30 For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD. Lev 16:31 It shall be a sabbath of rest unto you, and ye* ***shall***

afflict your souls*, by a statute forever*. It was both a fast and a Sabbath, and although fasting is not mentioned, it is implied, *Psa 69:10 And I weep in the fasting of my soul, And it is for a reproach to me*. YLT. Possibly this is what is meant by "the fast" in, *Act 27:9 Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because* ***the fast*** *was now already past, Paul admonished them*. It was the only fast commanded in the Law of Moses.

The purpose of the fast was to "afflict the soul", by chastening the body. I think that on the great day, when God forgave the nation of all its sins committed in the year past, thought was given as to those sins. Sadness and sorrow enveloped the soul as they considered their evils ways. They fasted because they were sad, they were sickened in their souls.

People often fasted in the Old Testament voluntarily in time of distress, sickness, death, calamity, war, and so on, either communally or privately. These are the cheerless times when the seriousness of life strikes home, and often sadness clouds the horizon. At times such as this there is a natural tendency not to eat, to be put off your food by worry, to be so concerned that you naturally turn to God for comfort. You move out of this world to the next for the alleviation of your distress, *Psa 73:14 I am sick all day, and I am punished each morning. Psa 73:15 If I had said evil things, I would not have been loyal to your people. Psa 73:16 It was hard for me to understand all this! Psa 73:17 Then I went to your temple, and there I understood what will happen to my enemies. Psa 73:18 You will make them stumble, never to get up again. CEV.* There is no doubt that calamity brings you closer to heaven than blessings do.

Nothing could compare to the loss of a child, and although conceived under evil circumstances, and in sin against the Lord, David was none the less granted forgiveness, *2Sa 12:13 And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. 2Sa 12:14 Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.*

David fasted and wept for his son while the boy was ill, but when he was dead, he stopped the fast, *2Sa 12:16 David therefore besought God for the child; and* ***David fasted****, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth. 2Sa 12:17 And the elders of his house arose, and went to him, to raise him up from the earth: but he would not,* ***neither did he eat bread with them****. 2Sa 12:18 And it came to pass on the seventh day, that the child died. And the servants of David feared to tell him that the child was dead: for they said, Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spake unto him, and he would not hearken unto our voice: how will he then vex himself, if we tell him that the child is dead? 2Sa 12:19 But when David saw that his servants whispered, David perceived that the child was dead: therefore David said unto his servants, Is the child dead? And they said, He is*

dead. 2Sa 12:20 ***Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the LORD, and worshipped****: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat. 2Sa 12:21 Then said his servants unto him, What thing is this that thou hast done? thou didst fast and weep for the child, while it was alive; but when the child was dead, thou didst rise and eat bread. 2Sa 12:22 And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live? 2Sa 12:23 But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me*.

The child was doomed from the start, but David thought "*Who can tell whether GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?*", so he chose a fast, an affliction of the soul. David's fast appeared to last a whole seven days, although we cannot be sure and whether it included anything to drink or not. But it didn't do any good and the child died, so you wonder whether the fasting was of any help whatsoever. It did not change God's mind, it did not heal the child and so what did it do? It afflicted David's soul. It caused him deep introspection, soul searching, repentance, a deep change in himself and a deeper respect of the Lord.

There is absolutely no guarantee that fasting will bring about healing, though it should not be ruled out. David fasted in the hope of healing, "*Who can tell whether GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?*" But that depends on what the Lord is trying to do. When people are ill today, Christians will often say, "I will pray for you", and of course that is a right thing to do, but it is hardly putting your back into the process, you are asking someone else, God, to undertake the healing. Have you ever heard someone say, "I will fast for you"? No, I have not, but it seems that if you really mean business, this is what you should do, prayer and fasting.

David and the people fasted for Saul and Jonathan, *2Sa 1:11 Then David took hold on his clothes, and rent them; and likewise all the men that were with him: And they mourned, and wept, and fasted until even, for Saul, and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the LORD, and for the house of Israel; because they were fallen by the sword*. It did not bring the dead back, but it was an expression of the people's grief at the loss of two warriors. The men of Jabeshgilead fasted seven days for Saul, *1Sa 31:11 And when the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead heard of that which the Philistines had done to Saul; 1Sa 31:12 All the valiant men arose, and went all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Bethshan, and came to Jabesh, and burnt them there. 1Sa 31:13 And they took their bones, and buried them under a tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days*. Fasting did something for the living who afflicted their souls and found comfort in God but it did nothing for Saul and Jonathan.

Fasting occurred many times for the sin of the people, for example, Moses fasted forty days because of the sin of Israel, *Deu 9:16 And I looked, and, behold, ye had sinned against the LORD your God, and had made you a molten calf: ye had turned aside quickly out of the way which the LORD had commanded you. Deu 9:17 And I took the two tables, and cast them out of my two hands, and brake them before your eyes. Deu 9:18 And I fell down before the LORD, as at the first, forty days and forty nights: **I did neither eat bread, nor drink water**, because of all your sins which ye sinned, in doing wickedly in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger*. Moses felt the sorrow of God for having brought this disobedient people out of Egypt, and he also mourned for them.

What did his fasting achieve? It had the effect of causing the Lord to hear the plea for the people, the plea of one man who successfully interceded for the people, *Deu 9:19 For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure, wherewith the LORD was wroth against you to destroy you. **But the LORD hearkened unto me at that time also**.* One person can have a lot of power with God, providing that he is sincere, providing that he genuinely afflicts his soul.

The well known example of a people repenting, not just one man, is shown by Jonahs visit to Nineveh, *Jon 3:6 For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. Jon 3:7 And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: Jon 3:8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Jon 3:9 **Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?***

The people of Nineveh, like David, did not know whether the Lord would hear them, "***Who can tell if God will turn and repent***", but unlike with David, God did listen, and you do not know whether God will repent, but sometimes He does, much to the Prophet Jonah's annoyance.

Daniel fasted for Israel as he confessed the sins of the people, *Dan 9:3 And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, **with fasting**, and sackcloth, and ashes: Dan 9:4 And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; Dan 9:5 We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments*: He associates himself with the sins of the people, confessing them and repenting of them. He shows his sincerity in the affliction of his soul.

We have seen in our study this far, that fasting is an extreme form of dedication and sorrowing of the soul. John Wesley said, "Some have exalted religious fasting beyond all Scripture and reason, and others have utterly disregarded it." It became a duty and a tradition among many, it was done for its own sake, and gradually people left out the humility and affliction of the soul, and it became an affliction of the body only. *Mat 6:16 Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites,* ***of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward****. Mat 6:17 But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; Mat 6:18 That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly*. The self-righteous Pharisee said, *Luk 18:12* ***I fast twice in the week****, I give tithes of all that I possess*, but just what were they fasting for?

Lent has now become one of those pointless fasts. Historically, fasting and abstinence has been maintained continuously for the weekdays of the whole Lenten season, with Sundays being days of abstinence only. The making of a Lenten sacrifice, in which Christians give up a personal pleasure for the duration of 40 days, is a traditional practice during Lent. Meat and animal-based products were forbidden. This meant eggs, butter, cream, milk and cheese could not be eaten. Several regions which produced little or no oil gradually obtained the right to eat butter, to compensate for the lack of fat. A truly vegan abstinence.

In some liturgical traditions, the word "Alleluia" is not said or sung during Lent. This is because Lent is a penitential season of reflection and sacrifice leading up to the celebration of Easter, which is a joyous feast. Since Sundays are not part of the penitential season, you are not required to practice signs of penitence on these days. The suggestions that you might to abstain from are,

- Give up coffee (or only brew it at home)
- Give up alcohol
- Give up certain social media sites, or limited them to certain days/time of day
- Give up electronics after a certain time in the day (i.e., no screens after 8 p.m.)
- Sleep without a pillow
- Wake up without hitting the snooze button
- Shower without hot (with only lukewarm) water
- Keep the thermostat several degrees cooler
- Park in the back of the parking lot and say a prayer as you walk to the grocery store
- Abstain from reading gossip/rumour sites

These are pointless things to do and not all food related, and therefore not strictly fasting. Are you really telling me that this is going to fulfil the requirement of “afflicting the soul”? It is a man made fast, it is non-biblical, and it doesn’t treat the subject seriously. Fasting was expected of men by Jesus but there is no scriptural command that insists Christians *must* fast. Fasting had to be genuine and sincere and that is the only guidance Jesus gave on the subject of fasting in the Old Testament.

21..... Jesus and Fasting in the Old Testament Part 2

Preparatory reading: Isaiah Chapter 58.

We continue to look into the subject of fasting from the Old Testament point of view, with our main idea of afflicting the soul, but you have to get your attitude right at the start. The Jew thought that by abstaining from food, depriving oneself, you gained the ear of God, just as in Elijah’s day, the prophets of Baal thought that they would get their god’s ear by acts of self sacrifice, *1Ki 18:27And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked. 1Ki 18:28 And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them. 1Ki 18:29 And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded*.

It seems that the Jews got quite desperate as the people neared their Judgement at the fall of the Temple, but God did not hear them. The people ask*, Isa 58:3 "Why should we fast if the LORD never notices? Why should we go without food if he pays no attention?" The LORD says to them, "The truth is that at the same time you fast, you pursue your own interests and oppress your workers. Isa 58:4 Your fasting makes you violent, and you quarrel and fight. Do you think this kind of fasting will make me listen to your prayers?* GNB.

This is another important element that we must consider when fasting, namely, are we being consistent in our faith, over the whole spectrum of our duties to God. Are we expecting God to do something for us, while we are not keeping His commands? “*The truth is that at the same time you fast, you pursue your own interests and oppress your workers. Your fasting makes you violent, and you quarrel and fight”,* on the one hand there is a religious attitude, fasting, and at the same time you pursue your own interests, you fight, oppress people, and you quarrel, *Mat 5:23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Mat 5:24 Leave there thy*

gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

They just didn't see it, *Isa 58:4 Don't you see that when you fast, you quarrel and fight and beat your workers? The way you fast today keeps you from being heard in heaven."* GW. God is talking on the Day of Atonement because it was the only fast day He commanded, the Day of Covering, the Day when sin was removed, *Lev 16:29 And this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month,* ***ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all****, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you: Lev 16:30 For on that day shall* ***the priest make an atonement for you****, to cleanse you,* ***that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD****. Lev 16:31 It shall be a sabbath of rest unto you, and ye shall afflict your souls, by a statute for ever.*

On such a day as this, where God forgave the people, the least they could do was forgive one another. God turns on the people and says, *Isa 58:6* ***Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?*** *Isa 58:7* ***Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?***

Keil and Delitzsch observed,

> "The ancients said, "not eating is a natural fast, but abstaining from sin is a spiritual fast." During the siege of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans a general emancipation of the slaves of Israelitish descent (who were to be set free, according to the law, every three years) was resolved upon and carried out; but as soon as the Chaldeans were gone, the masters fetched their liberated slaves back into servitude again.
>
> Then Jeremiah the prophet spake all these words unto Zedekiah king of Judah in Jerusalem*, Jer 34:7 When the king of Babylon's army fought against Jerusalem, and against all the cities of Judah that were left, against Lachish, and against Azekah: for these defenced cities remained of the cities of Judah. Jer 34:8 This is the word that came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, after that the king Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people which were at Jerusalem, to proclaim liberty unto them; Jer 34:9 That every man should let his manservant, and every man his maidservant, being an Hebrew or an Hebrewess, go free; that none should serve himself of them, to wit, of a Jew his brother. Jer 34:10 Now when all the princes, and all the people, which had entered into the covenant, heard that everyone should let his*

manservant, and everyone his maidservant, go free, that none should serve themselves of them anymore, then they obeyed, and let them go. Jer 34:11 But afterward they turned, and caused the servants and the handmaids, whom they had let go free, to return, and brought them into subjection for servants and for handmaids.

Their attitude seems to be very similar to the scribes and Pharisees, *Mat 23:3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. Mat 23:4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers*. Literally, it is the thongs of the yoke, the leather straps which fastened the yoke on the head of the oxen as they ploughed. Again we trace an echo of the thought and almost of the phraseology in Jesus' teaching, *Mat 11:29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. Mat 11:30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*.

The Pharisees were twofaced, they held to the formalism of ceremonies, fasting, and wicked selfishness. To summarise Jesus' view of them, "***ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves, ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone, you strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel, ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess, for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness***".

They are just like us if we are honest. We keep a certain pretence up that we are devoutly religious people, we go to church, we behave in an outward manner consistent with the expectations of the other Christians, we dress in a manner consistent with our belief and we keep that mask on for the few hours when it is expected, then we gradually lapse into our old worldly ways. We stand there as the Pharisee stood before the Lord and we self report on how things have gone in the past week, *Luk 18:11 The Pharisee stood over by himself and prayed, "God, I thank you that I am not greedy, dishonest, and unfaithful in marriage like other people. And I am really glad that I am not like that tax collector over there. Luk 18:12 I go without eating for two days a week, and I give you one tenth of all I earn."* CEV.

It reminds me of how I did my self-appraisal annual reports at work. It was I thought a useless exercise, because you never said anything bad about yourself.

But you had to do it and you had to have a different wording every year to show that you had produced a new appraisal. I just changed the wording in the document using the synonyms and the thesaurus in my word processor, so as to make the document look different, and so it was basically the same appraisal that I used year after year, up to my retirement. We do the same thing with our religion, we get confident in putting the same old front on, and we finally believe the rubbish which we invent about ourselves. We get very comfortable with the self image we make, and I am sure that like the Pharisee, we stand before God with no deliberate sense of masking what we have come to believe, "God, I thank you that I am not greedy, dishonest, etc “. With my resumé, you cannot fail to think that I am a worthy member of the kingdom.

As a result of this pharisaic self-deception, I think that many Christians give up on true self-examination,

> Thomas Chalmers, a Scottish church leader in the 19th century, knew that self-examination can be tiring and fruitless. He once compared self-examination to a dark room full of objects. We can’t see what is there because the room is pitch black. This darkness is the reason looking at ourselves is often so unfruitful.
>
> How do we brighten the room? Not by straining our eyes or taking more time and effort to examine the darkness. We will never see ourselves clearly simply by focusing more intently on ourselves.
>
> Instead, Chalmers says we must to go to the window and open the curtains. Let the light of Christ break into the darkness of your soul. The sunlight in Chalmers’s image is the truth of God’s word: “If we derive no good from the work of self-examination, because we find that all is confusion and mistiness within,” he says, “then let us go forth upon the truths which are without, and these will pour a flood of light into all the mazes and intricacies of the soul, and, at length, render that work easy, which before was impracticable.”

That’s a bit wordy but the sense is there. When we stop comparing ourselves to Jesus we are in a dark room. So it is that Isaiah concludes his homily, *Isa 58:8 Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward. Isa 58:9 Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; Isa 58:10 And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday*:

Fasting is in a sense giving up on the things which sustain our lives so that we might look upon the very issues which deprive us of the spiritual life, "not eating is a natural fast, but abstaining from sin is a spiritual fast." This might cast some light upon the verse where Jesus explains to His disciples, why they could not cast out the demon from the oppressed man, *Mar 9:28 And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out? Mar 9:29 And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting*.

Some miracles come at a price, and are not mere formalities. We, like the disciples, think that prayer is an easy thing and miracles come on the back of prayers, with no effort on our part. Usually we offer the suffering persons the glib encouragement that we will pray for them, and that of course is no cost to us, and so the lack of sincerity translates into silence as the answer from the Lord. We just did our religious duty, a bit like those who say a “hail Mary” for you, words quickly forgotten. Perhaps if we thought something of the poor sufferer, if we really wanted to see them in health, we might consider fasting for them, not just praying for them. Perhaps the disciples were too blasé, and just thought they could heal without any empathy for the person in front of them and additionally, little effort?

Isaiah finishes up on a similar note, empathy for the suffering, not just giving because it is the right thing to do, with no feeling for the sufferer, *Isa 58:10 If you give some of your own food to feed those who are hungry and to satisfy the needs of those who are humble, then your light will rise in the dark, and your darkness will become as bright as the noonday sun. Isa 58:11 The LORD will continually guide you and satisfy you even in sun-baked places. He will strengthen your bones. You will become like a watered garden and like a spring whose water does not stop flowing*. GW. That is the way to become strong with God.

In this brief look at the Old Testament, we can flesh out a few conclusions. There was only ONE fast specifically commanded in the Old Testament, namely on the Day of Atonement, and all fasting had reference to this, afflicting the soul for sin. It was not just going through the religious motions, without thinking of the wider issues that we could likewise help by giving to others, helping the widows and the poor, after all, we are in the same sinking ship of life as them.

Afflicting your soul was a humbling attitude before God, and if done sincerely, was a way to please Him. Fasting was like the carrier of prayer, the incense, wafting up to the Lord as a sweet small. If you did not do it with the right attitude it was an annoyance to Him and a pointless exercise, it had to be done with true repentance.

We have also seen that there were no set principles concerning the length or nature of fasting. A fast could be partial, restricted to some foods, or all food. It seems that it did not normally mean abstaining from liquids. Sometimes even the animals were involved as in the case of the people of Nineveh. A fast lasted from sunrise to sunset, after which you could eat, but on occasion lasted for a night, *Dan 6:18 Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of musick brought before him: and his sleep went from him*. Sometimes it lasted for seven days, as in the case of those mourning King Saul, or David mourning his child.

The longest fast was conducted by Moses, Elijah, and Jesus, the very persons that appeared on the mount of Transfiguration, *Luk 9:29 And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering. Luk 9:30 And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: Luk 9:31 Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem*. The three experienced the same extreme hunger in anticipation of deliverance.

The New Testament has some things to say about fasting and we shall look at these to try and obtain a fuller picture of the subject.

22..... Jesus and Fasting in the New Testament

Preparatory reading: Hebrews Chapter 10.

We now move to the New Testament, which is as you know, is not the section of the Bible that starts with the Gospels, but the section that starts with Acts, that is the New Testament. That confusing insertion by man, a page called “the New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”, does not belong at the commencement of the Gospels, it belongs at the end of the Gospels, which for the major part constitute the Old Testament. It seems to me that the real New Testament, from Pentecost onwards, is a new landscape with respect to fasting. After the institution of the New Covenant in “the blood of Christ”, after the resurrection of Jesus, there are certain things which have changed.

The Levitical feasts have been done way with, or fulfilled if you will, by Jesus. We do not celebrate year after year because, *Heb 10:1 Moses’ Teachings with their yearly cycle of sacrifices are only a shadow of the good things in the future. They aren’t an exact likeness of those things. They can never make those who worship perfect. Heb 10:2 If these sacrifices could have made the worshipers perfect, the sacrifices would have stopped long ago. Those who worship would have been cleansed once and for all. Their consciences would have been free from sin. Heb*

*10:3 Instead, this yearly cycle of sacrifices reminded people of their sins. Heb 10:4 (**The blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins**.)* GW.

The yearly cycle, the repetition of sacrifices, the repetition of imperfect animal sacrifices, was done away with by the sacrifice of Jesus, who with His ONE sacrifice for sin, on the Cross, put away the animal sacrifices forever, *Heb 10:5 For this reason, when Christ came into the world, he said, "'You did not want sacrifices and offerings, but you prepared a body for me. Heb 10:6 You did not approve of burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin.' Heb 10:7 Then I said, 'I have come! (It is written about me in the scroll of the book.) I have come to do what you want, my God.' " Heb 10:8 In this passage Christ first said, "You did not want sacrifices, offerings, burnt offerings, and sacrifices for sin. You did not approve of them." (These are the sacrifices that Moses' Teachings require people to offer.) Heb 10:9 Then Christ says, "I have come to do what you want." He did away with sacrifices in order to establish the obedience that God wants. Heb 10:10 We have been set apart as holy because Jesus Christ did what God wanted him to do by sacrificing his body once and for all. Heb 10:11 Every day each priest performed his religious duty. He offered the same type of sacrifice again and again. Yet, these sacrifices could never take away sins. Heb 10:12* ***However, this chief priest made one sacrifice for sins, and this sacrifice lasts forever.*** *Now he holds the honored position—the one next to God the Father on the heavenly throne.* GW.

The sacrifice on the Day of Atonement is done away with, superseded by the greater sacrifice of Jesus. To go on celebrating the Old Testament sacrifice of Atonement, Yom Kippur, is to deny that Jesus made His Atonement, and so with its demise in Jesus, is the demise of all that went with it, *Lev 16:30 For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD. Lev 16:31 It shall be a sabbath of rest unto you, and ye shall afflict your souls, by a statute forever*. The only fast that God gave is done away with because, *Heb 10:2 If there were worshipers who already have their sins washed away and their consciences made clear, there would not be any need to go on offering sacrifices*. CEV.

The atonement by Jesus has given us freedom from sin and sacrifice, *Col 2:16 Don't let anyone tell you what you must eat or drink. Don't let them say that you must celebrate the New Moon festival, the Sabbath, or any other festival. Col 2:17 These things are only a shadow of what was to come. But Christ is real!* CEV. Jesus has accomplished the atonement, *Rom 5:11 And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement*, and we are declared just by His free grace, *Rom 3:24 being justified freely by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; Rom 3:25 whom God has set forth a mercy seat, through faith in his blood, for the shewing forth of his righteousness, in respect of the passing by the sins that had taken place before, through the forbearance of God; Rom 3:26 for the*

shewing forth of his righteousness in the present time, so that he should be just, and justify him that is of the faith of Jesus. Darby.

It would seem that this fasting on the Day of Atonement was because sin was not removed by this sacrifice and that the soul was in consequence afflicted. Now this no longer holds true. Additional causes of fasting were also removed, such as war or threats of war, or when danger threatened because we are no longer citizens of this world's kingdom. We are told by Jesus that there will be wars so why pray against them? We seem to be in a situation where Christians try to prolong the misery of this life, wanting endless healing, they see the kingdom of heaven as a separate and lesser place, almost a fallback position for when we have exhausted the pleasures of this life, and we have to go to that dull and boring place called heaven. No, those that love this world let them say what they want, I do not see that we have anything to do with the politics of this world.

This reality is crumbling and falling apart, *Mat 24:6 And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. Mat 24:7 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.* What does Jesus say we have to do? Fast? No, He says, *Mat 24:12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. Mat 24:13 But* ***he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved***. Him that abides, in other words, him that stays the course, not him that fasts.

The attitude of Paul and Silas show their upbeat attitude to persecution by not fasting, *Act 16:23 And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: Act 16:24 Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. Act 16:25 And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them*.

That would leave the following reasons for fasting, the same reasons as in the Old Testament, a) when loved ones were sick, b) when seeking God's will, c) when seeking God's forgiveness. If you were to derive a doctrine of fasting from the New Testament only, you would have a much more cut down set of guidelines than the Old Testament. The subject of fasting only appears only in Acts and Corinthians in the New Testament.

It first appears in Acts with Cornelius a Roman, Gentile, proselyte, fasting, *Act 10:30 And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing.* As a proselyte, he had adopted Jewish customs, and therefore, in a sense was fasting under Old Testament directives, and he does not know of the work of Jesus yet. He was told to fetch Peter who had something to tell him, *Act*

10:22 And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee.

Meanwhile Peter had a vision in Simon the Tanners house, Act 10:9 On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: Act 10:10 And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, Act 10:11 And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: Act 10:12 Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. Act 10:13 And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.

It is not clear why Cornelius was fasting, though it was probably prompted by a desire for a deeper knowledge of the Lord. It also brought Peter to a deeper knowledge of his new faith, because the vision that Peter had was interpreted, *Act 10:28 And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean*.

This shows that the people who first received the Spirit at Pentecost, did not have a full knowledge of the requirements of the Gospel. In fact, about 9 years after Pentecost, Peter is still learning about the new faith, and he clearly does not know everything, especially the Gospel to all nation, that is to the Gentiles as well and we see that learning is a process, **not a memory dump**. The Lord did not give the Apostles all the knowledge that they needed at once but progressively, as and when they need of it, for His purpose. The apostles also proved that they were not infallible in their lives, as a further 9 years on from this event, Paul has to rebuke Peter for dissembling with the Jews. Who said the Apostles were “infallible”? There is only one person who is infallible, Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the life.

The evangelists who were on a missionary journey fasted and prayed, and chose elders, *Act 14:21 And having announced the glad tidings to that city, and having made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, and Iconium, and Antioch, Act 14:22 establishing the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to abide in the faith, and that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God. Act 14:23 And having chosen them elders in each assembly, having prayed with fastings, they committed them to the Lord, on whom they had believed*. Darby.

Was the fasting an essential part of God’s blessing upon their choice of elders? Or did fasting focus the mind of those who chose the elders? The apostles did not seem to make their choices blindly, in fact they also had very clear guidelines for the qualities of elders, *Tit 1:5 For this cause I left thee in Crete, that thou*

*mightest go on to set right what remained unordered , and establish elders in each city, as *I* had ordered thee: Tit 1:6 if anyone be free from all charge against him , husband of one wife, having believing children not accused of excess or unruly.* Darby. They perhaps chose the elders in a similar fashion to the deacons, *Act 6:3 Look out therefore, brethren, from among yourselves seven men, well reported of, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we will establish over this business*: People were chosen for their spiritual and moral qualities. What part fasting had to do with this is not clear.

In Corinthians, Paul exhorts Christians that they should fast but not overfast and neglect their marital duties, *1Co 7:4 A wife belongs to her husband instead of to herself, and a husband belongs to his wife instead of to himself. 1Co 7:5 So don't refuse sex to each other, unless you agree not to have sex for a little while, in order to spend time in prayer. Then Satan won't be able to tempt you because of your lack of self-control*. CEV. The word fasting is not in all of the texts.

Was fasting being used as an excuse not to have marital relations, “I’m sorry I’ve got a headache”? What were the couple fasting for? This is unknown, but with the disorder in the Corinthian church, did they pray serious prayers? An article in “The Christian Century”, by Douglas A. Campbell, shows what disorder the Corinthian church was in,

> The church at Corinth was a mess. I count 15 distinguishable problems that Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians: partisanship, with the Corinthians factionalizing behind rival leaders (1:10–4:21; 16:10–18); incest (5:1–13); prostitution (6:12–21); celibacy within marriage (7:1–7); Christians married to one another asking about divorce (7:8–11, 39); Christians married to pagans asking about divorce (7:12–16); questions surrounding marriage and remarriage (7:25–40); lawsuits (6:1–11); idolatry (8:1–11:1); concerns about women praying and prophesying in immodest ways (11:2–16); chaos in worship, with speaking in tongues and competing voices (chapter 14); inequality in the communal meal (11:17–34); denials of the bodily resurrection of Jesus and of Christians (15:1–58); the collection of a large sum of money to be sent to Jerusalem (16:1–4); and a change in Paul’s travel plans (16:5–9).
>
> Underlying this mess, there were four main difficulties: a basic failure in relating to one another in love; a dramatic failure of the local church leaders to act considerately in the face of their competition for status and influence; arrogant theological reasoning that denied the importance of the body (which we might call “Christian intellectualism”); and tensions arising from the pressures that Paul’s teaching about sex placed on his converts. Each of these problems would have been bad enough, but when they were all present together, the combination was toxic.

That's quite a list. Am I supposed to think that there is a married couple in Corinth conforming to Paul's ideals like a good obedient Christian couple? Or is the apostle just giving his advice as to what is ideal in the church, which was not present in Corinth? And the reason for a person to fast in the Corinthian situation is not given.

Finally I want to see what Paul does in his spiritual life. Paul mentions fasting twice, *2Co 6:4 But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, 2Co 6:5 In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; ……2Co 11:27 In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness*. He mentions it, strangely, in the context of persecutions and hardships, which is totally contrary to, *Zec 8:19 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, **shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness**, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace*.

A more up to date translation, the Berean Study Bible has, *2Co 6:5 in beatings, imprisonments, and riots; in labor, sleepless nights, and hunger; ……2Co 11:27 in labor and toil and often without sleep, in hunger and thirst and often without food, in cold and exposure*. BSB. Is this then talking about fasting? Dr Gill says, "in fastings; by which are meant not voluntary, but involuntary ones, through want of food to eat". I leave you to decide, but it seems that the apostle had a hard time of it while conducting his ministry.

So what are we to make of fasting in the New Testament period, is it required by Jesus' disciples or not? I think on balance it is a practice but less vigorous that the Old Testament, because many of the Old Testament reasons no longer exist. Jesus made a comparison between His disciples and John's, *Mat 9:14 Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not? Mat 9:15 And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast*.

Is Jesus still with us or not? That is the question and if He is do you fast for sorrow? You either do and think He is far from you or He is close and you do not fast.

But what of the Old Testament Day of Atonement? Although we are finished with the Law of ceremonies, and we are cleansed from sin, it still clings to us, *1Jn 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*. And what Christian is not sad for the sin he has committed, and for pain he has caused to the innocent one. Should he not fast and afflict his soul for the grief he has caused?

23..... Finding Jesus

Preparatory reading: John Chapter 5.

In John's Gospel, in the Old Testament, there is a telling Scripture, *Joh 5:39 Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. Joh 5:40 And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life*. Jesus is saying that you can know the Bible but not have eternal life. Gaining knowledge of Scripture is not the same as gaining a knowledge of Jesus. You could become the greatest Bible scholar that ever lived, know all the verses in the Bible and all the great doctrines of the Bible, yet fail to get in to the kingdom of heaven.

It is true that those self same Scriptures are "*they which testify of me*", they bear witness to Jesus, but of themselves they do not lead to eternal life, salvation, righteousness, or anything else for they are just words and they do not create new life in an individual soul. You can read about wings, you can know how they work, you can show how a bird flies, but you will never become a beautiful flying machine by book learning. You can read how Paul was saved on the Damascus road, how he met Jesus and how his life was forever changed, but unless you undergo a Damascene conversion, and a confrontation with Jesus, it remains just words on a page.

It does not matter what version of the Bible that you are wedded to, for I am sure hell is full of people who have used a different version to you or perhaps even the same version as you, and they burn just as well in hell. The loyalty to a version is touching but entirely pointless if Jesus is not found in you, and if what you read does not make you, "*come to me, that ye might have life*". That life which you seek after is not found on Bible paper, any more than the Law was truly found on tables of stone. That is totally lifeless, because it is not written on living material, flesh and blood, the heart of man by the Spirit of God, *2Co 3:3 Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.....2Co 3:7 But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: 2Co 3:8 How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?*

I am not saying that Scripture is of no value, it has lots of value, but it only has lasting value to a person who is born of God, *Rom 15:4 For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, **that we** through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope*. If you are just reading to find out information, that is good up to a point, but if you do not find Jesus as a real

person, as a result of your search, you have found nothing. All your learning was for nothing, a temporary satisfaction but an eternal loss, because, "*come to me, that ye might have life*".

The people that Jesus addresses, the Jews, of all people, should have expected the Messiah, and they should have been looking for Jesus, but instead, they had just held on to the Law and not looked for the person who would come out of the Law, *Deu 18:15 The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken*. The very person who had become god like to them was going to be their nemesis, *Joh 5:45 Don't think that I will be the one to accuse you to the Father. You have put your hope in Moses, yet he is the very one who will accuse you. Joh 5:46 Moses wrote about me, and if you had believed Moses, you would have believed me. Joh 5:47 But if you don't believe what Moses wrote, how can you believe what I say?* CEV.

That is remarkable, "*Moses wrote about me*", Moses wrote about Jesus, and they did not even see this for all their Scripture reading. Abraham too saw Jesus, but they didn't believe Him, *Joh 8:56 Your father* ***Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad****. Joh 8:57 Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Joh 8:58 Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am. Joh 8:59 Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by*.

It was not just that they saw Jesus through time, looking into the future, peering ahead of their time, the scripture says that they actually saw Him. Now the Bible says that, *Joh 1:18 No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.* Therefore when God appears, He does so not in the person of the Father, but in the person of the Son whom He hath appointed heir of all things. There are instances in the Old Testament where God took upon Himself a physical form for a short duration. Three times He appeared as a man, once in a burning bush that was not consumed, and four times as the Angel of the Lord. The Jews should have known this.

He appeared to Hagar, *Gen 16:13 And she called the name of Jehovah that spake unto her, Thou God seest me: for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?* Fleeing her mistress Sarah, Hagar encountered the Angel of Jehovah, and the Angel of Jehovah that appeared to Hagar was God Himself, she called the name of Jehovah who spoke to her, "you are the God that sees", for she said, "I have seen Him who sees me".

God appeared to Abraham and Sarah at Mamre, *Gen 18:1 And Jehovah appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the*

day; Gen 18:2 And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground. Darby. God again appeared to Abraham on Mount Moriah, *Gen 22:11 And the Angel of Jehovah called to him from the heavens, and said, Abraham, Abraham! And he said, Here am I. Gen 22:12 And he said, Stretch not out thy hand against the lad, neither do anything to him; for now I know that thou fearest God, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me.* Darby.

The Lord appeared to Jacob at Peniel, *Gen 32:24 And Jacob remained alone; and a man wrestled with him until the rising of the dawn. Gen 32:25 And when he saw that he did not prevail against him, he touched the joint of his thigh; and the joint of Jacob's thigh was dislocated as he wrestled with him. Gen 32:26 And he said, Let me go, for the dawn ariseth. And he said, I will not let thee go except thou bless me. Gen 32:27 And he said to him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. Gen 32:28 And he said, Thy name shall not henceforth be called Jacob, but Israel; for thou hast wrestled with God, and with men, and hast prevailed. Gen 32:29 And Jacob asked and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, How is it that thou askest after my name? And he blessed him there. Gen 32:30 And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel—For I have seen God face to face, and my life has been preserved.*

He appeared to Moses in the burning bush, *Exo 3:3 And Moses said, Let me now turn aside and see this great sight, why the thorn-bush is not burnt. Exo 3:4 And Jehovah saw that he turned aside to see, and God called to him out of the midst of the thorn-bush and said, Moses, Moses! And he said, Here am I. Exo 3:5 And he said, Draw not nigh hither: loose thy sandals from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Exo 3:6 And he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look at God. Exo 3:7 And Jehovah said, I have seen assuredly the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and their cry have I heard on account of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows*.

God appeared to Gideon, *Jdg 6:20 And the Angel of God said to him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so. Jdg 6:21 And the Angel of Jehovah put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. And the Angel of Jehovah departed out of his sight. Jdg 6:22 And Gideon perceived that he was an angel of Jehovah; and Gideon said, Alas, Lord Jehovah! for because I have seen an angel of Jehovah face to face... Jdg 6:23 And Jehovah said to him, Peace be unto thee: fear not; thou shalt not die*.

He appeared to Samson's parents, *Jdg 13:18 And the Angel of Jehovah said to him, How is it that thou askest after my name, seeing it is wonderful? Jdg 13:19 Then Manoah took the kid and the oblation, and offered it up to Jehovah*

upon the rock. And he did wondrously, and Manoah and his wife looked on. Jdg 13:20 And it came to pass, as the flame went up from off the altar towards the heavens, that the Angel of Jehovah ascended in the flame of the altar; and Manoah and his wife looked on, and fell on their faces to the ground. Jdg 13:21 And the Angel of Jehovah appeared no more to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that it was the Angel of Jehovah. Jdg 13:22 And Manoah said to his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God.

The Lord was in the fiery furnace, *Dan 3:24 Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonied, and rose up in haste; he spoke and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said to the king, True, O king. Dan 3:25 He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of God. Dan 3:26 Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the opening of the burning fiery furnace; he spoke and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, ye servants of the Most High God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego came forth from the midst of the fire. Dan 3:27 And the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had had no power, nor was the hair of their head singed, neither were their hosen changed, nor had the smell of fire passed on them.*

All of these people found God and in their encounter saw God. The God they saw in the form of “the Angel of the Lord”, “the Son of God” and as a man, as Stephen said, *Act 7:38 This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us*. But these people knew about God and recognised God, they were not people who were just finding out about Him and were on the start of their journey.

When you find Jesus, some say “when you are converted”, you are no doubt changed, but you do not have all the knowledge of Jesus, you are on a journey of discovery. Some religious people lay burdens upon you which Jesus did not, and they try to get you to conform to their way of “Christianity”, some have overcome certain faults which you have mastered and others have not, and there is the danger that you will be partial to those who are in your way of doing things. You should however not compare yourself to other people but compare yourself with Jesus.

The Christian journey does not end with “conversion”, it has only just begun, and if you stop there, you will never know what else is required of you. If you have an experience of “conversion”, I would say that it is an enabling event, which allows you to receive Jesus and His ways. It unlocks the possibility that you will go on and find out more and more about Jesus, changing yourself into His image, doing what He wants until at last your time in this world has finished and you go to

Him, *1Pe 1:7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: 1Pe 1:8 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: 1Pe 1:9* ***Receiving the end (τέλος) of your faith, even the salvation of your souls***.

Some young Christians think that they know it all when they are saved and they get puffed up with their vanity, some follow men because they think that they are good preachers, but do little study themselves, some feel that they have done enough to be like Jesus and just lapse into a routine Christianity, others do not even bother to examine their morality or pattern of life but see Christianity as an additional exercise, an adjunct to life. Some have never questioned how they worship, or how they should dress for worship, whether there is a pattern for them to follow, whether there is such a thing as marriage or divorce or indeed an absolute morality. Some are insensitive to others feelings and trample over them not even thinking there is within us such a thing as a conscience.

There is so much more to Christianity than a one off baptism and believing in Jesus. There is a whole change that is likened to shedding your skin, or killing the person you were, *Col 3:5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: Col 3:6 For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: Col 3:7 In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. Col 3:8 But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Col 3:9 Lie not one to another,* ***seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; Col 3:10 And have put on the new man****, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him*. If you are a new creature, then you have got a long way to go and this is where Paul introduces us to the practical nature of the “conversion” experience. All of those things that I alluded to, like following men, worship, marriage, divorce, conscience, etc, Paul brings out in his letter to the Corinthians. We have the residual of a sinful life to be thrown away, and it clings to us like an old skin, but Paul is not happy that we should stay that way, and besides there is much more to Christianity after “the honeymoon is over”.

When I began my walk with Christ, I thought that I knew it all or mostly all, and I immediately jumped into the intellectual books of the Bible, like Romans, Ephesians etc, and I was discussing doctrines like faith, justification, and predestination as things in themselves and they did not have an immediate relevance to my condition. Instead of reading Corinthians, and letting it speak to me personally, the devil had whispered to my heart, as he did to so many, “O, you’ve no need to take any great heed of that book, it doesn’t mean you”. But it

does mean me, but so many view it as referring to somebody else that they neglect it.

As a young Christian, I was having a Bible study, and I remember saying shall we look at 1 Corinthians Chapter 13, I clearly remember it because of the response of one of the people present. “It’s alright they said, I know that bit, I’ve done that, let’s do something else”. You see, that is how we treat Paul’s great letter, as an ordinary letter, we read it once and throw it in the bin, but his letter to the Romans is different, so we read that many times.

There is a need to put in place a “course correction”, to get us on track for the new life, which many do not see, in fact the Corinthians didn’t see it either. It is a painful thing to come to terms with what you are, the degree of sin into which you have fallen, but it is necessary if you are going to find the real Jesus. You and I must drop all pretensions, leave our sins at the cross and find out just what it is that we have to do.

24..... Who Do I Follow? Part 1

Preparatory reading: Acts Chapter 18

I will tell you a story about a dog that I rescued when I was a young man. I was at a friend’s house and out-side, on his driveway was an old car, even by the standards of that day. It was an Austin 7 and it had those old metal bumpers with sharp ends. Health and safety was not much thought of in those days. He also had a dog, which I think was an Airedale Terrier, and it was yappy and bounded around with excitement at seeing us. It didn’t watch where it was going and in its excitement impaled itself on the metal bumper which cut, like a machete, between its ribs and the tough furry coat, I ran to hold the creature and stop the bumper from running further into its skin, and when help arrived we managed to get the struggling dog off of the metal.

Now I thought that the dog and I would be good friends after that episode, and it would have recognised me as its saviour, but it didn’t. To the contrary, every time the dog saw me there after it went for me, as I must have been the cause of its pain. And therein lies a lesson. You may be the most caring person, but that care will not be seen in a person who sees you as the cause of their discomfort. A person telling you the truth about yourself will not be greeted as a friend but an enemy. This is a part of the price you pay for telling the truth and speaking the Gospel, for it will create enemies among those you strive to save. That I think was Paul’s position in Corinth.

I am looking at Corinth now because when Paul on his journeying came there to preach Jesus he was not well received and that in part was due to the state of

that people and I do not think that they liked what he had to tell them. Many Corinthians who found Jesus, found that their current behaviour was not compatible with the Gospel and this shows that we have more to do than merely accept Christ as Saviour, we have to put off sin.

It is necessary first of all to show what sort of city Corinth was, to give a bit of background to the story before jumping in to Scripture. The people are a product of their environment and culture, so we must see the City in context, to bring it alive and understand it. Here is a short history of it Corinth: The City and the Church by Julian Spriggs, I also suggest that you get hold of a map of the area,

At the time of Paul's missionary journeys, Corinth was the leading city of Achaia. Achaia was the Roman province which covered the southern part of the modern nation of Greece. Athens was still the educational centre of Achaia, but Corinth was the capital of the Roman Province and the major commercial centre.

Corinth lay on a narrow isthmus, only six kilometres across, which connected the southern part of the Greek peninsula to the mainland, with sea to the east and west. This strategic position made Corinth one of the richest cities and greatest trading centres of the ancient world. All traffic from Athens and the North of Greece to Sparta and the Peloponnese had to pass through Corinth because of its position on this narrow neck of land.

In addition to the north-south trade, a great proportion of the east to west traffic also passed through Corinth. The three hundred kilometre journey by sea around the southern capes of the Peloponnese was very dangerous and dreaded by sailors. Many sailors said, "Let him who sails round Cape Malea forget his home" (Strabo Geography 8:6:20). Because of this, and to save time, many smaller boats were hauled across the narrow isthmus on rollers. Larger ships were unloaded and the cargo transported by land to ships on the other side. A paved road called the Diolkos (meaning 'to haul across') was built across the isthmus in the sixth century BC. This was six kilometres long, and between three and six metres wide. There were several attempts at cutting a canal across the isthmus. The first was by Alexander the Great. Another attempt by Nero in AD 66 was abandoned after experts told him that the seas on each side were at different levels, so flooding would occur! A canal was finally built in 1893.

Corinth had a strategic location at the foot of the Acrocorinth, a steep, flat topped mountain to the south of the city, that rose up to eight hundred metres. The acropolis was on the top, making it one of the most easily defended strongholds of that time. Corinth lay on a plateau overlooking the isthmus, near to three harbours. The two main harbours were Lechaeum (2 km west) and Cenchreae (12 km east). There was also the little used Schoenus (also to the west). So Corinth was known as the 'two sea'd Corinth'.

Objects of luxury soon found their way to the markets, which were visited by people from every nation in the civilised world; Arabian balsam, Phoenician dates, Libyan ivory, Babylonian carpets, Cilician goat's hair, Lycaonian wool, and Phrygian slaves. Corinth was especially famous for its production of high quality bronze-ware.

The Phoenicians first settled there, introducing profitable business as well as their worship. Greeks later took control and named the city Corinth. Macedonians held the city from 335 to 197 BC, when the Romans took control, declaring it a free city in 196 BC In 146 BC, it rebelled against Rome and as reprisal, was destroyed by the Roman general Lucius Mummius. He killed all the male population, and sold the women and children into slavery, and took its famous art treasures to Rome, leaving the city in ruins for a hundred years.

Julius Caesar rebuilt it as a Roman Colony in 44 BC, with Latin as its official language. It soon regained prominence, becoming the capital of the Roman province of Achaia in 27 BC. The rapid growth in its population soon made it the third largest city of the Roman Empire after Rome and Alexandria. He populated it with freedmen from Rome, who became the most numerous inhabitants. There were also many Greeks, Jews and other peoples, making it a cosmopolitan port city. The population is difficult to estimate, but was probably around 200,000, plus 500,000 slaves, all squashed into a small area. It was a rough, tough city with a bad reputation. Much of Corinth was destroyed in an earthquake in AD 77, after which the city was rebuilt.

Modern Corinth, with a population of sixty thousand, was rebuilt a short distance away from the original site, because of an earthquake in 1858. Many of the ruins of the original city have been excavated.

In Paul's time, the city was marked by wealth, luxury and immorality, so much that 'to corinthianize' was a term given to anyone, anywhere, who lived a life of excess and immorality. Plato used the term 'Corinthian girl' as a euphemism for a prostitute. The relative newness of the city gave it an air of being a modern boom-town, with a great

mixture of cultures, philosophies and religions. Constant trade built the wealth of the merchants, attracting people from both East and West, who brought a mixture of religions with them, including the original Greek religion and philosophies, together with the mystery cults from Asia and Egypt, as well as Judaism. The Greek writer, Pausanias, described over twenty-six sacred places devoted to different gods and lords.

Von Dobschütz wrote this:"The ideal of the Corinthian was the reckless development of the individual. The merchant who made his gain by all and every means, the man of pleasure surrendering himself to every lust, the athlete steeled to every bodily exercise and proud in his physical strength, are the true Corinthian types: in a word the man who recognised no superior and law but his own desires" (Morris, page 19).

Corinth was the centre for the Isthmian Games, which were held in nearby Istmia every other year, in honour of the god Poseidon. These were second in importance to the Olympic Games. Contests included running, boxing, wrestling and racing with horses and chariots. By request of Nero musical and poetry contests were added. Paul uses metaphors from the Greek games as illustrations (1 Cor 9:24-27). The imperishable crown promised for believers would contrast with the perishable crowns given at the Isthmian Games made out of withered celery plants.

There was a large temple of Aphrodite (the goddess of love and beauty) on the highest peak of the Acrocorinth, which according to Strabo had more than a thousand priestesses who were sacred prostitutes (this may be an exaggeration). Each evening they walked down the mountain in a long line (all dressed in white, with shaved heads) to the market place to get clients. The cult was dedicated to the glorification of sex, parallel to the worship of Astoreth and Ishtar from a thousand years earlier.

The place of Paul's trial before the proconsul Gallio has also been excavated. This was the governor's judgement seat which has an inscription saying 'rostra' (the Latin term for the Greek bema - Acts 18:12). An inscription saying, "Lucius the butcher", was found in a shop in the agora. The remains of the temple to Apollo are near the site of the meat market. Surplus meat from the temple was taken for sale in nearby shops. Paul addresses the issue of eating meat previously offered to idols (1 Cor 10:25).

This is how the Bible describes Paul coming to Corinth. *Act 18:1 After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; Act 18:2 And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. Act 18:3 And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers. Act 18:4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. Act 18:5 And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. Act 18:6 And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. Act 18:7 And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. Act 18:8 And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized*.

Paul made first visit in about 50-52 AD, during the last phase of his second missionary journey, after starting churches in Macedonia -- Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea, this was 20 years after the crucifixion of Jesus. The letter we call "1st Corinthians" is really 2nd Corinthians. Paul gives us a hint that he wrote an earlier letter when he says, *1Co 5:9 I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators.* This may have been part of a lively correspondence which is now lost, *2Co 2:4 For out of much affliction and anguish of heart* ***I wrote unto you*** *with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you.....2Co 7:8 For though I made you sorry* ***with a letter****, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season*. It may be this correspondence was lost, because it was unpalatable to the receiver, and as you know you do not keep letters that you do not like.

Paul spent a full 18 months in Corinth and so you would have expected them to be fairly competent Christians, especially with the Jewish contingent who knew their Bible, *Act 18:11 And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them*. There was after all, a ruler of the synagogue among their number, who had just been converted. However, we note that according to Paul the assembly at Corinth was a mess. After all that teaching, 18 months of it, they were quite slow to change, but I suppose that in Corinth this was no surprise considering the public morals, probably among the Greeks or Gentile population. Additional communication was necessary, and Paul writes "1st Corinthians" a letter which we have in our Bible, to the assembly.

He had already touched upon "fornication" in his previous correspondence (1 Cor 5 v 9), and he goes for this and about 14 other matters in the Corinthian assembly that need addressing. Fornication, the Greek word is πόρνος = pornos

come from πέρνημι which means to sell, hence a (male) prostitute. These were sex workers both male and female and they were part of everyday life, much like today and just as acceptable among the dissolute members of our society. Remember that we spoke of the Temple of Aphrodite and the sacred prostitutes, though today's merchants of sex are just as open but without the pretext of religion.

There was much in Corinth that the young Christians had accepted as normal in life, and their Christianity could just as easily accept the status quo, and probably become "Christian prostitutes". This produced some tensions in the assembly, *1Co 1:11 For it has been shewn to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of the house of Chloe, that there are strifes among you*. Darby. There was a lack of unity due I suppose to this mixture of former Jews and Gentiles, a clash of cultures, like those who came out of old Egypt, a "mixed multitude".

The mix of Jew and Gentile, the Old Christians and the New Christians, those with some grounding in the Scripture and those with none, made for a disparate assembly. Did factions, I am of Paul, I am of Apollos and I am of Christ start to emerge? Was it because of their different cultures or to keep their cultures separate that they played one leader off against another? At the Anglican church of St John near us in Hartley Wintney, they hold two Sunday morning services. First there is a traditional service which is populated by older people, and this is followed by a different service which caters for younger people. This is the very thing which Paul is fighting against, because it is allowing the cracks of disunity to flourish and grow wider.

I must also say at this point, in case you thought that the Corinthian assembly was one "mega church" that Paul usually addresses an assembly in a location, a city, rather than addressing it as individual assemblies locally. I mean by this that where I live, in the town of Bracknell, there is a Baptist church, a Pentecostal church, an Anglican church, a Brethren assembly, a catholic church, to name but a few. If Paul were to write to us a letter, he would not send multiple copies of it to individual churches in Bracknell, he would not address it to each assembly, but to "the Assembly which is in Bracknell". Examples are, *1Co 1:2 to the assembly of God which is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints, with all that in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both theirs and ours…….. Eph 1:1 Paul, apostle of Jesus Christ by God's will, to the saints and faithful in Christ Jesus who are at Ephesus…….. Php 1:1 Paul and Timotheus, bondmen of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers and ministers*;

An assembly in a location is not a brisk building which we call a church, *Tit 1:5 For this cause I left thee in Crete, that thou mightest go on to set right what remained unordered , and establish elders in each city, as *I* had ordered thee.* Darby. Paul wanted elders not "churches". The elders were over cities not

buildings called churches. Assembly is used and not churches in Darby's version, to I suppose get rid of the notion that a "church" is not a building but an assembly of people.

Paul writes to the assembly, Christians, in the city of Corinth.

25..... Who Do I Follow? Part 2

Preparatory reading: 1Corithians Chapters 1, 2, and 3. CEV.

Paul had a long way to go in correcting the behaviour of the young Christians in Corinth. He had spent 18 months with them and he still had much to teach. The long letter that we have, 1st Corinthians, is continuing the task of instilling in them a behaviour that becomes Christians. Of course he was not the only one teaching there, he had his fellow tent makers, a husband and wife team, *Act 18:1 And after these things, having left Athens, he came to Corinth; Act 18:2 and finding a certain Jew by name Aquila, of Pontus by race, just come from Italy, and Priscilla his wife, (because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome,) came to them, Act 18:3 and because they were of the same trade abode with them, and wrought. For they were tent-makers by trade. Act 18:4 And he reasoned in* ***the synagogue*** *every sabbath, and persuaded Jews and Greeks*

As well as these helpers he had Silas and Timothy, *Act 18:5 And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.* Things did not go well however and the synagogue turned against him, *Act 18:6 Finally they turned against him and insulted him. So he shook the dust from his clothes and told them, "Whatever happens to you will be your own fault! I am not to blame. From now on I am going to preach to the Gentiles."*

They were not all stubborn Jews, but as had happened elsewhere, some of the Jews believed what Paul taught, *Act 18:7 And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. Act 18:8 And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.* With this contingent of Jews Paul went and preached the Gospel to the Gentiles or Nations.

Then came an important word from the Lord in a vision, *Act 18:9 Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: Act 18:10 For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee:* ***for I have much people in this city.*** *Act 18:11 And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.* Paul was probably despairing of his task and the persecution he was under, so it must have

encouraged him to persevere for the Lord's sake and it told him that God had many people in that city. Not that Paul had seen much of them in that pagan city, and I suppose that not many had yet heard the Gospel, or been born again, but the Lord knows those that are His and it was just a matter of time.

Having stirred up a hornet's nest among them, and knowing that he would not be hurt, Paul presses on in the face of opposition, *Act 18:12 While Gallio was governor of Achaia, some of the Jewish leaders got together and grabbed Paul. They brought him into court Act 18:13 and said, "This man is trying to make our people worship God in a way that is against our Law!" Act 18:14 Even before Paul could speak, Gallio said, "If you were charging this man with a crime or some other wrong, I would have to listen to you. Act 18:15 But since this concerns only words, names, and your own law, you will have to take care of it. I refuse to judge such matters." Act 18:16 Then he sent them out of the court. Act 18:17 The crowd grabbed Sosthenes, the Jewish leader, and beat him up in front of the court. But none of this mattered to Gallio.* CEV.

I do not know what was worse for Paul, the struggle to get people to come to the Lord or the great difficulty in changing them once they had, *Act 18:18 And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.*

We now come to the first problem that Paul tackled by letter, not that I suppose it was the first time he had mentioned it, that of Divisions in the Church, *1Co 1:11 Several people from Chloe's family have already reported to me that you keep arguing with each other. 1Co 1:12 They have said that some of you claim to follow me, while others claim to follow Apollos or Peter or Christ. 1Co 1:13 Has Christ been divided up? Was I nailed to a cross for you? Were you baptized in my name?* CEV. Chloe's family were uncomfortable with the arguing going on, disputing about following people, being tribal amongst themselves, favouring some man over another.

Does it matter? Yes it does, because right at the start, there was a schism forming which would destroy them, and it was the first thing that Paul tackles. About 5 years earlier, he had written to the Galatians about the same behaviour, *Gal 2:11 When Peter came to Antioch, I told him face to face that he was wrong. Gal 2:12 He used to eat with Gentile followers of the Lord, until James sent some Jewish followers. Peter was afraid of the Jews and soon stopped eating with Gentiles. Gal 2:13 He and the other Jews hid their true feelings so well that even Barnabas was fooled. Gal 2:14 But when I saw that they were not really obeying the truth that is in the good news, I corrected Peter in front of everyone and said: Peter, you are a Jew, but you live like a Gentile. So how can you force Gentiles to live like Jews?* CEV. Peter favoured the Jews over the Gentiles and this was plain wrong.

It was divisive and Paul had the courage to confront it. He did not offer a compromise, a middle ground to satisfy both parties, he did not mediate between them, set up therapy sessions to help them think it through, give them time to cool off. Paul says it like it is, and if you do not think that being direct is being gracious, then tell me what is? If an apostle is wrong it is even more grounds for a public rebuke, not a private rebuke, because it sends a message to everybody not to disobey. This extract from "The Autobiography of Sergeant William Lawrence" shows in the aftermath of the battle of Waterloo, 1815, cowardice was not tolerated,

> While we were lying there several of the wounded who had recovered rejoined the army from Brussels, and with some of these Bartram made his appearance, the man whom I mentioned as having smelt powder at the beginning of the 18th of June, and having so cowardly fallen out of his rank. As soon as I saw him I put him in the rear-guard as a prisoner, and reported him, as it was my duty to do, to the captain of my company. Next day a court-martial was ordered, I being the chief but not the only evidence against him, and being sentenced to three hundred lashes as a punishment for absenting himself from the field of action, he was tied up and received every lash.
>
> This may seem to some a hard case, three hundred lashes for absenting himself, **but it must be remembered that had there been many like this man, for I cannot call him a soldier, that day would most decidedly have ended in favour of the Frenc**h. When taken down he was sent to hospital for three weeks and then came back to us, but even then he was not quite free, for I had orders from the captain to examine his kit to see if everything was complete, and I found his knapsack completely empty. I then searched his pouch and found all his ammunition gone. I was not much surprised at this, knowing that he did not like the smell of powder; but I reported these circumstances to the captain, who ordered him back to the rear-guard as a prisoner again; and the next day another court-martial was held on him for making away with his kit, and he was sentenced to three hundred more lashes, of which strange to say he received every one without crying out. He seemed to be a man without any feeling, for it may be pretty well taken for granted that the drummers did not fail in their duty towards such a man as this, for there is no one they feel more strongly against than a coward.

I am not saying we punish people in the same manner, but we are an army, and if we fight with different rules for some, we will soon be fighting each other and we will be doing satan's work for him. We must not go in the strength of human wisdom but in the wisdom of Jesus our leader.

Paul is at pains to point out to the Corinthians that it does not matter who baptised you, *1Co 1:15 Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name*. Baptism was a washing, it was not an initiation into a particular tribe of "Baptists" that you then followed, and that you held in high regard among the other servants of Jesus. It was a rite of passage, a one off thing and it did not matter who baptised you.

Look says Paul, "Christ is the Wisdom and power of God". But you are all looking at men, perhaps because you have been brought up in a culture that reveres certain Greek philosophers. We don't work that way, *1Co 1:18 The message about the cross doesn't make any sense to lost people. But for those of us who are being saved, it is God's power at work. 1Co 1:19 As God says in the Scriptures, "I will destroy the wisdom of all who claim to be wise. I will confuse those who think they know so much." 1Co 1:20 What happened to those wise people? What happened to those experts in the Scriptures? What happened to the ones who think they have all the answers? Didn't God show that the wisdom of this world is foolish? 1Co 1:21 God was wise and decided not to let the people of this world use their wisdom to learn about him. Instead, God chose to save only those who believe the foolish message we preach. 1Co 1:22 Jews ask for miracles, and Greeks want something that sounds wise. 1Co 1:23 But we preach that Christ was nailed to a cross. Most Jews have problems with this, and most Gentiles think it is foolish*.

Yes, it was difficult to accept, because this Christianity brought with it a new culture and a new type of leadership. It was not man's way of thinking or doing, it had a wisdom that transcended this life, *1Co 2:6 We do use wisdom when speaking to people who are mature in their faith. But it isn't the wisdom of this world or of its rulers, who will soon disappear. 1Co 2:7 We speak of God's hidden and mysterious wisdom that God decided to use for our glory long before the world began. 1Co 2:8 The rulers of this world didn't know anything about this wisdom. If they had known about it, they would not have nailed the glorious Lord to a cross. 1Co 2:9 But it is just as the Scriptures say, "What God has planned for people who love him is more than eyes have seen or ears have heard. It has never even entered our minds!" 1Co 2:10 God's Spirit has shown you everything. His Spirit finds out everything, even what is deep in the mind of God*.

The cult of personality was dead as far as the Christian was concerned. There was no man above another, as Jesus Himself had taught, *Mat 23:10 None of you should be called the leader. The Messiah is your only leader. Mat 23:11 Whoever is the greatest should be the servant of the others. Mat 23:12 If you put yourself above others, you will be put down. But if you humble yourself, you will be honoured.* CEV.

But of course the Gospels had not been written yet, so Paul uses his own words, *1Co 1:24 Our message is God's power and wisdom for the Jews and the Greeks*

that he has chosen. 1Co 1:25 Even when God is foolish, he is wiser than everyone else, and even when God is weak, he is stronger than everyone else. 1Co 1:26 My dear friends, remember what you were when God chose you. The people of this world didn't think that many of you were wise. Only a few of you were in places of power, and not many of you came from important families. 1Co 1:27 But God chose the foolish things of this world to put the wise to shame. He chose the weak things of this world to put the powerful to shame. 1Co 1:28 What the world thinks is worthless, useless, and nothing at all is what God has used to destroy what the world considers important. 1Co 1:29 God did all this to keep anyone from bragging to him. 1Co 1:30 You are God's children. He sent Christ Jesus to save us and to make us wise, acceptable, and holy.

The new mindset was Spiritual not carnal, and people who insisted on arguing just did not have the mind of Jesus, *1Co 2:14 That's why only someone who has God's Spirit can understand spiritual blessings. Anyone who doesn't have God's Spirit thinks these blessings are foolish. 1Co 2:15 People who are guided by the Spirit can make all kinds of judgments, but they cannot be judged by others. 1Co 2:16 The Scriptures ask, "Has anyone ever known the thoughts of the Lord or given him advice?" But we understand what Christ is thinking.*

1Co 3:1 My friends, you are acting like the people of this world. That's why I could not speak to you as spiritual people. You are like babies as far as your faith in Christ is concerned. 1Co 3:2 So I had to treat you like babies and feed you milk. You could not take solid food, and you still cannot, 1Co 3:3 because you are not yet spiritual. You are jealous and argue with each other. This proves that you are not spiritual and that you are acting like the people of this world. 1Co 3:4 Some of you say that you follow me, and others claim to follow Apollos. Isn't that how ordinary people behave? 1Co 3:5 Apollos and I are merely servants who helped you to have faith. It was the Lord who made it all happen. 1Co 3:6 I planted the seeds, Apollos watered them, but God made them sprout and grow. 1Co 3:7 What matters isn't those who planted or watered, but God who made the plants grow. 1Co 3:8 The one who plants is just as important as the one who waters. And each one will be paid for what they do. 1Co 3:9 Apollos and I work together for God, and you are God's garden and God's building.1Co 3:10 God was kind and let me become an expert builder. I laid a foundation on which others have built. But we must each be careful how we build, 1Co 3:11 because Christ is the only foundation.

That is the important point that Paul has laboured towards. **JESUS THE ONLY FOUNDATION**. The Corinthian assembly had been building all wrong. It was not built on the merits of men, Paul or any of the other leaders, no matter how great they seemed to men. It didn’t use human wisdom, which God regarded as foolishness compared with His own. It was on the only foundation that would carry the weight of the assembly and that foundation was Jesus.

Divisions in the church based on the cult of personality were anathema to Paul, and he tackles this matter first. It is still with us today because you find Christians saying, I am of Calvin, I am of Arminius, I am of Luther, to which I apply the words of Paul, "*Has Christ been divided up? Was I nailed to a cross for you? Were you baptized in my name?*" these men have feet of clay, I have feet of clay, so don't follow me, follow Christ.

26..... The Problem of Worldly Wisdom

Preparatory reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 1 verse 18 to Chapter 2 verse 16.

The new Christians have been warned to avoid the cult of personality and to have Jesus alone as their head. The next issue that will face the young Christian is where does he go to get his knowledge from and how will he become wise? *1Co 1:18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. 1Co 1:19 For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.*

The first question that we have to answer is what is wisdom, *1Ki 3:10 God said: Solomon, I'm pleased that you asked for this. You could have asked to live a long time or to be rich. Or you could have asked for your enemies to be destroyed. Instead, you asked for wisdom to make right decisions. 1Ki 3:11 (SEE 3:10) 1Ki 3:12 So I'll make you wiser than anyone who has ever lived or ever will live. 1Ki 3:13 I'll also give you what you didn't ask for. You'll be rich and respected as long as you live, and you'll be greater than any other king. 1Ki 3:14 If you obey me and follow my commands, as your father David did, I'll let you live a long time. 1Ki 3:15 Solomon woke up and realized that God had spoken to him in the dream. He went back to Jerusalem and stood in front of the sacred chest, where he offered sacrifices to please the Lord and sacrifices to ask his blessing. Then Solomon gave a feast for his officials*. CEV.

This wisdom is shown later on to be judgement and discernment in the case of the two prostitutes, and Solomon's wisdom in discerning which one was the mother of a living child, *1Ki 3:24 And the king said, Bring me a sword. And they brought a sword before the king. 1Ki 3:25 And the king said, Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other. 1Ki 3:26 Then spake the woman whose the living child was unto the king, for her bowels yearned upon her son, and she said, O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it. But the other said, Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it. 1Ki 3:27 Then the king answered and said, Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it: she is the mother thereof. 1Ki 3:28 And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment*.

The wisdom also showed itself in a great knowledge of the natural world, *1Ki 4:32 And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five. 1Ki 4:33 And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes. 1Ki 4:34 And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom.*

Wisdom has within it the elements of judgement, discernment and knowledge, and what Paul is advising these new believers is to avoid the wisdom of the world, *1Co 2:14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*. The young believer is at a disadvantage in that they have very little knowledge and so are open to a lack of godly wisdom, *1Co 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. 1Co 3:2 I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. 1Co 3:3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men*?

It should be apparent that God does not gift you all the knowledge in the universe when you are saved, and He allows you to suffer with the knowledge you possess, which may run contrary to the truth, and that is for His own reasons. This knowledge of God comes with obedience to Him and it is a goal of the faith, *1Co 1:10 Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*. God assists the assembly with different gifts to make them reliant upon one another, but although some knowledge and some wisdom is given, it is not given to all, *1Co 12:7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. 1Co 12:8 For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit*.

As I said, wisdom is not given to all as a direct gift but possibly it is given through the means of a fellow Christian, but the aim is to become unified, speaking the same thing, and with the consequence that there is no division, no divided body. This says to me that unity among Christians is within reach and being achievable because the Lord has it as a reasonable goal, though we must ask why it does not happen more? The answer I think lies in the structure which assemblies or churches have, particularly today, where no attention is given to the real unity of belief on what the scriptures actually say. We as mature Christians should encourage others to see the same truths in the Bible, but we must also be very careful that we distinguish between what is truth and what is speculation, and we need to exercise patience with the slow learners. An example of this is given

in Romans, *Rom 14:15 If you are hurting others by the foods you eat, you are not guided by love. Don't let your appetite destroy someone Christ died for*. CEV.

Another example of the assemblies failing to achieve real unity by coming to a patient knowledge of truth, is given with the denomination of Christian Brethren, some of the names you will have heard of or will get to know,

> The separation of the independent or open brethren from the Exclusive Brethren occurred (in 1848) when John Nelson Darby denounced Benjamin Wills Newton, an elder of the Plymouth assembly, at that time the largest of the Brethren assemblies, over disagreements **concerning prophecy** and **church organisation**. Darby forced him to admit to theological errors, then attacked George Müller and Henry Craik at Bethesda Chapel in Bristol for accepting two others of that assembly, even though they were not implicated in any of Newton's errors.
>
> This led to a separation of Bethesda from Darby and a clear adoption of an independent or congregational stance by many of the assemblies. The statement of the assembly at Tottenham gives clearly the position of the Open Brethren:
>
> We welcome to the (Lord's) table, on individual grounds, each saint, not because he or she is a member of this or that gathering or denomination of Christians nor because they are followers of any particular leader, but on such testimony as commends itself to us as being sufficient. We distinctly refuse to be parties to any exclusion of those who, we are satisfied, are believers—except on grounds personally applying to their individual faith and conduct.

Had Darby been patient with Newton, who had admitted his error, and not spilled the dispute over into other assemblies whose members "were not implicated in any of Newton's errors", things might have ended differently. The issue of prophecy was also divisive amongst them, as you might expect, and with such a speculative subject it should not have been one of the issues that defined faith, other than Christ's second coming, the subject of prophecy being open to many interpretations. The whole history of the Plymouth Brethren is littered with schisms, which if they had followed Paul's advice would have had a better outcome, especially with the world watching, *1Co 1:10 My dear friends, as a follower of our Lord Jesus Christ, I beg you to get along with each other. Don't take sides. Always try to agree in what you think*. CEV.

I suppose that carnality, fleshliness, can come disguised as the cloak of self righteousness, which pretends to stand and defend Jesus, but in reality it is only defending what you believe. That is why I would suggest that the Christian is

slow to act joining an assembly, weighing up if possible, the direction it is going, but at all times having fellowship with those who love the Lord.

Wisdom is not limited to a few issues, but it encompasses the whole Christian life, *1Co 1:20 Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 1Co 1:21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. 1Co 1:22 For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: 1Co 1:23 But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; 1Co 1:24 But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. 1Co 1:25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

There is God's wisdom on the one hand and man's wisdom on the other hand, and we have plenty of one, man's wisdom, by being brought up in a sinful world, and we have little of God's wisdom because, *1Co 2:14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*. That is why it is no good reasoning with an unbeliever, a natural man, because it is like reasoning with a corpse.

This would explain why Christianity does not gain traction in a sinful world among men who have not been converted by the Spirit of God. They just cannot see the wisdom of God. This extends far beyond the confines of religion into the realms of "science" so called, philosophy, and every speculative realm, where we are supposed to accept the pronouncements of experts, without any verifiable evidence.

The subject of the organic evolution of mankind, is a philosophy, set in train by Charles Darwin, without any evidences, and it is only speculation. But here in the 21st Century, certain scientists cling to this discredited hypothesis as an actual fact. That blind atoms, without guidance, operating in darkness, with no goal in sight, somehow managed to organise themselves into complex creatures. This of course required a lot of time and imagination, so this too is invented to prop up the hypothesis. Millions of years are created to bolster this theory and yet they know that life is so complicated and mutations are so slow, that even the time they invent is not enough. Dr James Tour has challenged the whole scientific community over this and he has been met with silence. But what do you expect from unbelievers?

There is a whole philosophy, a world view, dedicated to this godless philosophy, this anti-Christian scheme of thought. But God says that He will confound them, *1Co 3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written,*

He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. 1Co 3:20 And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain. 1Co 3:21 Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours.

I do not know how “big”, how intelligent, how wise, how complex, how much above your thinking, that you think the Lord of Heaven is. Perhaps you thought there was not much difference between you, *Psa 50:18 You made friends with every crook you met, and you liked people who break their wedding vows. Psa 50:19 You talked only about violence and told nothing but lies; Psa 50:20 you sat around gossiping, ruining the reputation of your own relatives." Psa 50:21 When you did all of this, I didn't say a word, and you thought, "**God is just like us**!" But now I will accuse you. Psa 50:22 You have ignored me! So pay close attention or I will tear you apart, and no one can help you*.

What foolish little ants we are to think that we can ever come near the wisdom, the intellect of God. The Psalmist was overwhelmed by the majesty of the universe and said, *Psa 8:3 When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; Psa 8:4 What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him*? We can scarce think out our place in the universe.

But it is a universe with a Creator or it is not. If there is no creator, then there is no meaning to anything that happens, and what happens, happens. It is a universe without good and evil, without any of the so called values that we like to attribute to life, love, beauty, goodness, kindness, righteousness, for these are absolutely meaningless in a universe without a creator. Order is an illusion.

Jesus brings order and meaning to the world in which we live, *1Co 1:30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: 1Co 1:31 That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord*. We do not know the answers to many of the questions we have, but you may be sure of this, absolutely certain of it, that the person who does not accept the wisdom and guidance of God is a poor guide for you to follow because, *Rom 8:6 The corrupt nature's attitude leads to death. But the spiritual nature's attitude leads to life and peace. Rom 8:7 This is so because the corrupt nature has a hostile attitude toward God. It refuses to place itself under the authority of God's standards because it can't. Rom 8:8 Those who are under the control of the corrupt nature can't please God*. GW.

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27..... The Problem of Carnality

Preparatory reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 3.

As I was preparing this ministry, I was led to think about the field of “Christian counselling”. This sprung up in the 1980’s and Christian counselling became widespread. Anyone with the right training could become a Christian counsellor, and so a new form of ministry was born and Christian counseling became main stream. I was struck at the time by a book produced by Jay Adams called “The Christian Counselor’s Manual” and his accompanying handbook “the Christian Counselor’s Casebook” giving examples of counseling. It’s on Internet Archive free if you want to look at it https://archive.org/details/christiancounsel0000adaml2n9/mode/2up . It seemed to me that the people he was counseling were not believers and why they want counseling is not known, or even if the person asked for it. Here is an example, it is called, “I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT YOU".

> Joan, the attractive 31-year-old mother of two children, has been attending your church for about three months. She is not a member. After some initial counselling, she claims to have come to faith in Christ. She seems to have made some progress in beginning to live as a Christian and recently expressed interest in making a public profession of faith. All efforts to meet her husband have failed. He says that, “he doesn't want to talk with any preacher.”
>
> Joan now seeks further counselling, this time concerning her marriage; she says that she has uncovered evidence that her husband is unfaithful to her. The two, she claims, have been drifting further apart every day. You advised her to confront him with the charge.
>
> During conversation at church on the Sunday following the counselling session at which she offered thin revelation, Joan made the following two surprisingly affectionate comments, “Pastor, I just love to spend time with you!” and “I think about you often.” (Incidentally, you have another counselling session with Joan scheduled for two days hence.)

Certainly this session uncovered a can of worms and I leave you to think of how you might sort it out. Of course, something is wrong in the woman’s relationship, but before we invent a whole new industry for treating the problems, shouldn’t we go back a bit, to look at the back story, to see what the assemblies should have been doing to avoid this, and to remove the need for another sticking plaster to cover the problems that are caused by neglect?

To be honest I and a lot of my fellow Christians got swept up into Christian counselling. I suppose we should have asked a lot more questions about it, not least, “Who shall counsel the counsellors?” We would institute counselling sessions as part of the church/assembly practice, not giving the people a chance to opt out. We would treat it as a confessional, but seldom did we get a positive response, and it was just another way of controlling, rather than liberating God’s

people. We said the counselling was to change people but did it change them for the better? It was just another layer of church bureaucracy that we could have done without.

We must ask some serious questions of this case study that Jay Adams mentions. For instance, how did the woman in this study, come to make a profession of faith, what sort of church/assembly did she go to, what subjects did they, the church, minister on, practical do it yourself Christianity or just feel good ministries, was Jesus the emphasis of the teaching? I note in a search of the Christian case book that the word “Jesus” only occurs 4 times throughout! There is a lot of foundational teaching that obviously has not been dealt with in the past and he is picking it up now.

When a person comes to Jesus in today’s assemblies, they are generally left to themselves to struggle on with the others in the assembly. Old and young Christians alike are generally treated the same and neglected equally with regard to their lives outside of meetings. There does not appear to be any great structure in the meetings, to produce mature Christians, and there are ministries that are often interesting but irrelevant to the state of the hearers. It is an assembly in name only. Compare Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians which is to young Christians, 18 months old, it is vibrant, it pulls no punches, it takes them to task over multiple issues, he says “come on, sort yourself out NOW”. He doesn’t give them nice Bible talks that are interesting to them but irrelevant to their condition. He doesn’t fill them with Bible facts but with practical Christianity.

I am sure that this approach by Paul makes the services of the Christian counsellor redundant. The Christian counsellor is a stop gap, so to speak, after the horse has bolted. It is doing what should have been done at conversion but was left undone and now it has to combat the years of reinforcement of bad behaviour. The Christians ought to have a concern for each other to stamp on sinful behaviour, when they see it and not leave it to counsellors.

This Paul does with the third of his subjects for correction, “the carnal Christian”, the fleshly Christian, the σαρκικός Christian. We get the word sarcophagus from this word, sarkos and phagos, means flesh eating, to describe the decay of the human body in a tomb, also the word sarcastic. Paul wants them to get rid of the flesh, their carnal nature which they had in virtue of being born in sin, *1Co 3:3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men*?

That is very hard language on young Christians, telling them they have jealousy, and strife, and divisions among themselves. Surely they will just get up and walk out on you? Well some just might, but you have done no wrong in telling them and it will have the effect of purifying the assembly in two ways, it will remove

the disobedient and it will confirm the obedient. If you saw somebody standing in the road, about to get knocked flat by a vehicle, and you just left them to their fate, what sort of person are you? Certainly not a Christian.

The first thing about "carnality" is to recognise that we are carnal, and at our new birth we are carnal, sold under sin, *Rom 7:14 For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin*. If you say,"no I am not sold under sin" then you have absolutely no need of Jesus, and His death for sin is meaningless to you. If you are a sinner and know it, there is hope for you, *1Jn 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 1Jn 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1Jn 1:10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us*.

We recognise that our "carnal" mind is at war with God even if we kid ourselves that it isn't, *Rom 8:6 For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Rom 8:7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. Rom 8:8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.* We may think we are saved, but this is only the first step to heaven. We don't, in our current state of lack of subjection to the word of God, come anywhere near to the measure of Jesus, and "*flesh cannot please God*" in that state.

Paul says to these Christians, that he cannot talk to them in that spiritual language of maturity, but will talk to them as babies, *1Co 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. 1Co 3:2 I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. 1Co 3:3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions,* ***are ye not carnal, and walk as men****? 1Co 3:4 For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal*?

"Carnality" and a "hard heart" are good bedfellows, working the same havoc in men's lives. All of mankind's sin, conspire in him to work a mind that is working against God's purpose, and that is why he cannot please Him. A trip through the Old Testament will show you that some of the great saints were troubled by the plague of carnality. David and Bathsheba are a prime example of what Paul will come on to telling us. David's lust torn and hard heart caused disruption to his life. The child of the adultery was killed by the Lord, Bathsheba's husband Uriah was killed by David's command, and Ahithophel, Bathsheba's grandfather turned against David, and eventually hanged himself.

Carnality will affect us, but it will also have its collateral damage reaching far beyond us in time. Sin has its wages, payback time, and the Lord does not always judge instantly but is very longsuffering. Sad to say, we do not often see

the relationship between our sin and the things that we suffer, because we do not give time to exploring self, *Psa 139:23 Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: Psa 139:24 And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting*.

If we find the hand of the Lord heavy upon us, for whatever reason, we immediately ask for prayers, not for understanding as to why we are in the condition that we find ourselves. We pray for healing without thinking why the Lord gave us whatever we have, in the first place. We just want it taken away without asking, “why has this come upon me?”

What we do echoes in eternity, *1Co 3:12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; 1Co 3:13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is*. This verse is followed by a reminder that whatever you build will be tested by the Lord’s fire, *1Co 3:14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. 1Co 3:15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.*

I am sure there are lots of people who think that they are going to be among the Christians who will be at the front of the queue when it comes to handing out the gold and silver, first prizes for achievement. How many of them will be disappointed? If I go back through my life and examine how much hay, wood and stubble I built, I am ashamed, and I think that for many years I lived on a religious rubble heap. From my human point of view, from the carnal position, I was doing well, but when I sit and think of it from Jesus point of view, it was not at all good. I was both carnal and I had a hard heart, and I was building a religion which had no real relationship with what Jesus taught. It was just man’s hand me downs of a corrupted Christianity. Comparing yourself with yourself or with your church is not the way you should see things. Try comparing yourself to Jesus and you will get a whole new perspective on your life.

Are you saved if you do build hay wood and stubble? Dr Gill has one insight into this,

> **If any man's work shall be burnt**,.... If any minister's doctrine he has preached shall be destroyed and disappear, shall be disapproved of, and rejected by the churches, not being able, to bear the light and heat of the fire of God's word: **he shall suffer loss**; of all his labour and pains he has been at, in collecting together such trifling, useless, and inconsistent things; and of all that glory and popular applause he might expect from men, on account of them, and which was the snare that drew him into such a way of preaching: **but he himself shall be saved**; with an everlasting salvation; not by his ministerial labours,

> much less by his wood, hay, and stubble, which will be all burnt up; but through his being, notwithstanding all the imperfections of his ministry, upon the foundation Christ:

So does David Guzic,

> It is a sobering thought: many, many people who believe they are serving God, but are doing it in an unworthy manner or with unworthy "materials" will come to find in eternity that they have, in reality, done *nothing* for the Lord. Some will be saved, but with a life that was wasted, and receive no crown to give to Jesus, for His glory (as in Rev 4:10-11). **He himself will be saved, yet so as through the fire** shows that some will be saved, but barely saved, and saved with everything gone.

Albert Barnes says,

> **But he himself shall be saved -** The apostle all along has supposed that the true foundation was laid 1Co 3:11, and if that is laid, and the edifice is reared upon that, the person who does it shall be safe. There may be much error, and many false views of religion, and much imperfection, still the man that is building on the true foundation shall be safe. His errors and imperfections shall be removed, and he may occupy a lower place in heaven, but he shall be safe.

I note that this verse talks about what you build, not your attitude of mind. You may be a very poor Christian, a poor builder, a very carnal person, a baby in Christ dressed as an adult, but you have in that guise a devotion to Jesus, not a denial of Him, *1Jn 2:21 I did not need to write you about the truth, since you already know it. You also know that liars do not belong to the truth. 1Jn 2:22 And a liar is anyone who says that Jesus isn't truly Christ. Anyone who says this is an enemy of Christ and rejects both the Father and the Son. 1Jn 2:23* ***If we reject the Son, we reject the Father****. But if we say that we accept the Son, we have the Father. 1Jn 2:24 Keep thinking about the message you first heard, and you will always be one in your heart with the Son and with the Father*. You may still be saved although what you did counts for nothing.

If you are a denier of Jesus, you set His word at nothing, His person at nothing, *Heb 10:26 For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, Heb 10:27 But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries*. In that case you are lost forever.

There is a fine dividing line between these two types of person, the carnal Christian and the denier of Jesus, because the former, the carnal person, is in

danger of becoming the latter person who is doomed. Continuing in carnality is in effect denying Jesus as the Way. Paul is right to tell us to get rid of all carnality for that way we may sleep better, with more assurance of our faith.

28..... The Problem of Immorality in the Assembly

Preparatory reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 5: verses 1 – 13.

This is the subject that Paul has already raised with Corinthians in another letter, where he says, *1Co 5:9 I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators*: Fornication, as we saw, was the Greek word πόρνος = pornos which comes from πέρνημι, which means to sell, hence a (male) prostitute. These were sex workers both male and female and they were part of everyday life, much like today and just as acceptable among the dissolute members of our society.

What did the apostle use as a teaching manual? The New Testament wasn't complete and the letters that Paul wrote were only circulating slowly. It was to be another 300 years before a canon, a rule of scripture that we are familiar with as the "Bible", appeared. The Gospels, Mathew, Mark, Luke and John had not been written and Luke's historic work on the development and growth of the Gospel was a work in progress. There was an older Testament, a Greek version in circulation and that was about it.

You notice that Paul does not refer them to the books of the Old Testament so that they would get a grasp of Old Testament history, besides they had a Jewish contingent in the assembly which could help them with that. Paul focuses on their morality and behaviour. You are what you think about and what you do, not how you would prefer people to think about you. What will stop our progress to the kingdom of God is not how much you know, but the moral state of your soul. If we persist in the things that Paul has warned us to get rid of, we shall be cast out, *1Co 6:9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, 1Co 6:10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. 1Co 6:11 And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God*.

The morality which guided Paul was written in the Old Testament, *Exo 20:13 Thou shalt not kill. Exo 20:14 Thou shalt not commit adultery. Exo 20:15 Thou shalt not steal. Exo 20:16 Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. Exo 20:17 Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox,*

nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's. Fornication is covered in the entire second table of the Law.

Paul starts with the statement, *1Co 5:1 I have heard terrible things about some of you. In fact, you are behaving worse than the Gentiles. A man is even sleeping with his own stepmother. 1Co 5:2 You are proud, when you ought to feel bad enough to chase away anyone who acts like tha*t. CEV. **What makes this a sin**? The Lord does, *Lev 18:1 The LORD told Moses Lev 18:2 to tell the people of Israel: I am the LORD your God! Lev 18:3 So don't follow the customs of Egypt where you used to live or those of Canaan where I am bringing you. Lev 18:4 I am the LORD your God, and you must obey my teachings. Lev 18:5 Obey them and you will live. I am the LORD. Lev 18:6 Don't have sex with any of your close relatives, Lev 18:7 especially your own mother. This would disgrace your father. Lev 18:8 And don't disgrace him by having sex with any of his other wives. Lev 18:9 Don't have sex with your sister or stepsister, whether you grew up together or not. Lev 18:10 Don't disgrace yourself by having sex with your granddaughter Lev 18:11 or half sister Lev 18:12 or a sister of your father or mother*..... CEV.

There were many laws about relationships, *Lev18:24 Don't make yourselves unclean by any of these disgusting practices of those nations that I am forcing out of the land for you. They made themselves Lev 18:25 and the land so unclean, that I punished the land because of their sins, and I made it vomit them up. Lev 18:26 Now don't do these sickening things that make the land filthy. Instead, obey my laws and teachings*. They form a body of laws called the laws of Consanguinity, which means the laws of "blood relations" or the degree of kinship.

This is not an arbitrary thing, God plucking a random law out of the bag and imposing it because He can. I will venture to suggest that the reason for not having relations with blood relatives is to remind us of something very important. Blood was the very essence of life, *Gen 9:3 Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. Gen 9:4 But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat. Gen 9:5 And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Gen 9:6 Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man*.

Blood was sacred. It had to be poured out on the ground and was never consumed, which is why the Jew is fastidious in his butchery of animals, ensuring that the blood is removed from them. In our relationships too, we are reminded of the sacred nature of the relationship and so we must keep the blood of our wife apart from her relatives. The woman having her period is also separated from her husband for the duration of her menstrual flow. This law of the older

Testament is still held sacred by the New Testament in virtue of what it still stands for. The blood of all things was forbidden, except for one thing, the blood of Christ.

You are bidden to drink this often, *1Co 11:25 After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me*. Our Lord Himself said, *Joh 6:54 Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. Joh 6:55 For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.* In drinking the wine we are drinking the blood, albeit in symbolic form, but it is just as real as blood to us because it reminds us that we are redeemed by that precious substance.

Do you see what we have just done in the way of expounding this word? We have seen it in the light of Jesus, we have looked and found the reason in Christ's work not in some artificial expedient of man. Jesus is the key to Scripture, and if you are struggling to find a reason or a meaning in some Bible event or teaching, then look closely at Jesus, for in Him you will find the meaning.

Fornication, the blanket term for sexual immorality, is a very broad subject, not just limited to consanguinity, sex with blood relatives, it covers many other types of mingling. It covers homosexuality that is the relationship between same sex persons. This comes about, according to Paul when man gets rid of God, *Rom 1:22 They claim to be wise, but they are fools. Rom 1:23 They don't worship the glorious and eternal God. Instead, they worship idols that are made to look like humans who cannot live forever, and like birds, animals, and reptiles. Rom 1:24 So God let these people go their own way. They did what they wanted to do, and their filthy thoughts made them do shameful things with their bodies. Rom 1:25They gave up the truth about God for a lie, and they worshiped God's creation instead of God, who will be praised forever. Amen. Rom 1:26 God let them follow their own evil desires. Women no longer wanted to have sex in a natural way, and they did things with each other that were not natural. Rom 1:27 Men behaved in the same way. They stopped wanting to have sex with women and had strong desires for sex with other men. They did shameful things with each other, and what has happened to them is punishment for their foolish deeds. Rom 1:28 Since these people refused even to think about God, he let their useless minds rule over them. That's why they do all sorts of indecent things*. CEV.

Why should it be wrong? It is not wrong to ask that question, because if you hold a particular view without holding that view in faith, that you do not have a godly reason for it, you are holding the belief sinfully, *Rom 14:23 ..... for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.* Doing the right thing for the wrong reason is to do something in sin. Doing things for a reason, and a right and Godly reason, in understanding of what you are doing is most certainly the way we should be

developing, *Eph 4:13 This will continue until we are united by our faith and by our understanding of the Son of God. Then we will be mature, just as Christ is, and we will be completely like him*.

Homosexuality and other sins are the result of the judicial punishment of God upon our wayward hearts. That is why people practice these things, because they are lawless. But we have not seen what it is that makes this so bad in the eyes of the Lord. What is wrong with a man going with a man and a woman going with a woman? There is nothing wrong with a man going with a woman. I think this highlights another great truth about Jesus.

We, the believers are called Christ's bride, *Rev 19:7 Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. Rev 19:8 And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints*. Both men and women, the redeemed, form the body which is called the bride. They have a relationship with Jesus, not a physical sexual or carnal relationship, but a spiritual relationship.

The idea that sexual intercourse defines a marriage is incorrect, it is an analogue of that spiritual relationship in heaven. First the earthly and then the heavenly. That's why we cease to be "sexual beings" in heaven, *Mar 12:25 For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven.* Angels do not have partners and in consequence do not have children.

Homosexuality is a prohibition on an earthly relationship until the heavenly relationship is revealed. Men and woman are forbidden same gender, to highlight the sanctity of the heavenly relationship, but the heavenly relationship is not sexual in nature. Christian men and women will love Jesus in equal measure, for who He is.

Fornication has many guises or perversions of true relationships. Pornography, derived from the same Greek word for fornication, is just one such form. Here are some trends from various sources describing pornography today,

> The University of Bournemouth and the University of Roehampton commissioned a survey of 500 adults on this subject, and it found that one in five people in the UK watched more pornography in the spring of 2020. And the University of Montreal estimates that 100 million adults, which translates to roughly 3% of the global population, experience 'problematic pornography'.
>
> The United Kingdom has the second highest incidence of internet pornography searches in the world, alarming new data shows. Figures

highlighted by The Sun (!) newspaper show that an average of 16,600,000 searches for porn took place in the UK each month in 2021. The only country that exceeded this number was the United States, with around 68,000,000 monthly searches. The US population is 40 times larger than the UK's. Canada comes third in the list, followed by the Philippines, Germany, Australia, France and Italy. The data also demonstrates a huge rise in searches during the pandemic. It has been well-documented that the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a growing number of people consuming pornography. People were understandably feeling anxious and lonely, and were isolated within their homes, leading to more opportunity to consume pornography.

A major new survey of British schoolchildren's attitudes to pornography has found significant numbers of young people aged between 14 and 18 are watching it frequently, with some becoming addicted to sexually explicit content. Teachers say they are being left to "pick up the pieces" from the damage pornography causes in schools, with the proliferation of adult material leading to warnings of sexually harmful behaviour among teenagers.

The head teacher of one school involved in the survey said the impact of violent pornography on her pupils is so severe that they have used special training to respond to a large rise in reports of sexual abuse. The study by Dignify, a charity that researches sexual abuse, spoke to 4,000 children between the ages of 14 and 18 in Hertfordshire. It found that 22% of students had viewed porn on multiple occasions. Of those, one in five said they had a porn habit and one in 10 said they felt addicted. Those who watched more than once were more likely to report having acted out something they first saw in pornography videos.

Pornography addiction is often driven by the release of dopamine in the brain rather than sexual desire, which is often the assumption.

Paul may have not had the internet to contend with but pornography was just as available. "Adultery" (μοιχάω = *moichaō*) did not mean extra-marital sexuality but "violation of a respectable woman" or "violation of a woman's honour," and it was construed in such a way that "μοιχάω was a crime against another man". A married man was perfectly free to have sex with his female (or male) slaves, since the slaves' bodies "were completely vulnerable to the master's sexual advances. The place of slavery in the sexual landscape of classical antiquity could hardly be overestimated." The slave trade was in fact "driven by the demand for commoditised sexual availability".

It is interesting that pornography is driven by the dopamine response in the brain, forming an addiction, as this article from “Yale Medicine” explains,

> Addiction is now understood to be a brain disease. Whether it’s alcohol, prescription pain pills, nicotine, gambling, or something else, overcoming an addiction isn’t as simple as just stopping or exercising greater control over impulses. That’s because addiction develops when the pleasure circuits in the brain get overwhelmed, in a way that can become chronic and sometimes even permanent. This is what’s at play when you hear about reward “systems” or “pathways” and the role of dopamine when it comes to addiction. But what does any of that really mean?
>
> One of the most primitive parts of the brain, the reward system, developed as a way to reinforce behaviors we need to survive—such as eating. When we eat foods, the reward pathways activate a chemical called dopamine, which, in turn, releases a jolt of satisfaction. This encourages you to eat again in the future. When a person develops an addiction to a substance, it’s because the brain has started to change. This happens because addictive substances trigger an outsized response when they reach the brain. Instead of a simple, pleasurable surge of dopamine, many drugs of abuse—such as opioids, cocaine, or nicotine—cause dopamine to flood the reward pathway, 10 times more than a natural reward.

Pornography is addictive. Once started it becomes increasingly easier to do, more rewarding, and more demanding. The plasticity of the brain means that as the brain chemistry alters, the behaviour changes and it becomes a reinforced behaviour, and more difficult to transform back. The bible does give advice on how we might go about reversing the addiction, *Php 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things*.

Fornication is the sin of a relationship which makes everything Jesus stands for null and void. Even in marriage, fornication can occur in the thoughts or in the unequal yoke with an unbeliever, or in rebellion against God, because we are not making our marriages like the example He gave.

29..... The Problem of Addiction to Sin

We saw last time that pornography was an addictive behaviour and that it has become a major problem among the people of God,

> When the Tiverton by-election took place a couple of weeks ago, due to the resignation of Neil Parish, an MP caught watching porn in parliament, it brought the reality of the epidemic into the very heart of public life. In a recent YouGov report published in July 2022, 76 per cent of men and 53 per cent of women said they have, at some point, watched porn. Around a third of those men (36 per cent) said they watch pornography at least once a week. An Ofcom survey revealed that nearly half (49 per cent) of UK adults viewed porn during September 2020, and Naked Truth's own survey of over 2000 individuals showed that 13 per cent of those surveyed identified themselves as addicted to it.
>
> The devastating impact of porn use on individuals and relationships is significant. Marriages, ministries, families and futures can be left in ruins. There are people in our churches and wider communities walking with addiction, betrayal, trauma, relational crisis, breakdown and depression - all caused by or deeply affected by pornography.
>
> These shocking statistics are not restricted to non-Christians. 57% of pastors and 64% of youth pastors admit they have struggled with porn, either currently or in the past. 42% of practicing Christians in the UK say they have a 'porn addiction', with over 50% admitting viewing adult content at least once a month.

I do not think that the Christian realises how much of an impact all of the sinful behaviours have on him or her, because they are just a part of his makeup and thinking, a part of his being an accepted member of society, part of his daily life, part of his upbringing. But listen carefully to what Paul says, *Rom 7:7 Does this mean that the Law is sinful? Certainly not! But if it had not been for the Law,* ***I would not have known what sin is really like****. For example, I would not have known what it means to want something that belongs to someone else, unless the Law had told me not to do that. Rom 7:8 It was sin that used this command as a way of making me have all kinds of desires. But without the Law, sin is dead. Rom 7:9 Before I knew about the Law, I was alive. But as soon as I heard that command, sin came to life, Rom 7:10 and I died. The very command that was supposed to bring life to me, instead brought death. Rom 7:11 Sin used this command to trick me, and because of it I died*. CEV.

We did not know what sin was like until we were told that such and such is a sin. But equally you could have been told that something was a sin, when it was not. Someone might tell you that you have to make the sign of a cross on you when

you are baptised and that validates the act on babies, providing it is done by a bona fide minister, whatever that is, but that is a lie.

Sin is missing the mark, *Jdg 20:16 Among all this people there were seven hundred chosen men lefthanded; every one could sling stones at an hair breadth, and not miss*. The word in Hebrew for "miss" is חָטָא or sin. The people of Benjamin who threw with the sling did not "sin" when they let fly the stone, in other words, they did not miss. But we do "miss", or sin, in our daily lives and as Paul says, we do not even know it unless there is a law which is communicated to us and tells us so.

The Corinthian Christians were hearing it for the first time, and the way they were living their lives was not at all compatible with the way God wanted them to live their lives. They had embraced Jesus as their one and only Saviour but their lives were not right with God, according to their behaviour. With Paul they could say, "***I would not have known what sin is really like***" unless you had told me your Law. Well, he is telling the Corinthians now.

Sin is something that can grow in us unnoticed, a parasite which lives off of us. In the extreme case of demon possession, the soul is so overcome with sin that the personality is lost. But to the Christian who sees sin for what it is, it is an unwelcome companion to life, *Rom 7:19* For the good that I would I do not: but *the evil which I would not, that I do. Rom 7:20* ***Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.*** *Rom 7:21 I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me*.

Sin will be always there, tempting us, and just when we think we have got a victory, it will bite us. I think that as Christians we will have sin with us throughout this life, *1Jn 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: 1Jn 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. 1Jn 1:****8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*** *1Jn 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1Jn 1:10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us*.

How do we square this with the verse in 1 John chapter 3 verse 6, which implies Christians do not sin, *1Jn 3:6 No one who abides in him* ***keeps on sinning****; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. 1Jn 3:7 Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. 1Jn 3:8 Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. 1Jn 3:9* ***No one born of God***

makes a practice of sinning*, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.* ESV.

The reason I think that this is a better translation because the “present active indicative” of the Greek verb for sin, means a continuance of the action, hence “keep on sinning”. The Christian does not “keep on sinning” but the Christian does sin. He is at war with sin, it is his enemy but at times it may capture him. Christians have a lot of difficulty with this concept of sin.

It can lead to double standards, hypocrisy on the grand scale for many Christians, because they think that a Christian is somebody who is sinless, or doesn’t sin and this leads to a teaching of sinless perfection. It holds that it is possible for Christians to completely defeat sin in the present life and to live holy lives like Jesus did. At a glance, it makes a lot of sense. Jesus came to save us from sin. He died for our sins on the cross and He sent his Holy Spirit to empower his people to overcome sin and to live obedient, righteous lives in the present*, Tit 2:12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world* . Christians should have the highest aspirations for living holy lives and rejecting all sin. That is really something we should aspire to.

There is a much-repeated (but possibly untrue) story about the 19th century Baptist preacher C.H. Spurgeon in which he debunked perfectionism in a memorable way. Spurgeon was at a conference where a preacher taught perfectionism in an outspoken manner and even claimed to have reached a state of sinless perfection himself. Spurgeon didn’t challenge him on the spot. Instead, the next morning he poured a jug of milk over the man’s head, to which the ‘perfectionist’ responded with the kind of rage and hostility that you’d expect from any sinner. Perfectionism debunked.

I think that it is this misunderstanding about sin which makes Christianity, as a religion seem so hypocritical to someone on the outside of it. A sincere Christian may indeed want to present their faith to the world by not going to the excesses that the world does in its behavior. Take the issue of alcohol for example, the Christian may decide it is better not to drink because of the harm it can do to people. Although the Temperance Societies started as a social movement, the churches too got involved, and these sprung up in Victorian England, as the article by Rebecca Smith shows,

> The temperance movement was a major cause of social reform in Victorian Britain. In the eighteenth century, the English middle and upper classes religiously served and drank wine at their dinners, and the working class frequently consumed beer and cider. During the nineteenth century, however, the consumption of alcohol among working-class men began to be viewed as a wasteful and illicit form of

> entertainment which served no purpose, caused many problems, and was scorned and fought against by the temperance movement. The temperance movement focused on the drinking habits of men, because men drank publically and because the drinking habits of women were unknown. While its goals changed according to its respective leaders, it achieved what it originally set out to do: control drunkenness and change Victorian England's lenient treatment of alcohol abusers. Clearly, the temperance movement's main focus was working-class drinking, as the movement was dominated by middle-class men who felt that by fighting intemperance they were helping the working class.

The Band of Hope was a non-denominational movement with membership open to all children who pledged to abstain from drinking alcohol. It began in 1847, grew rapidly and in some locations it maintained its popularity for over a hundred years. “With an estimated membership of half the school-age population by the early twentieth century, well over three million, the Band of Hope [… had a] wide range of activities and material to educate, entertain and empower millions of children, and […] mobilised its child members to lobby for legal change, including prohibition”. The Rechabites were part of the Temperance Movement. They take their name from a Biblical tribe who were commanded 'to drink no wine' by their leader Jonadab son of Rechab. It is written that they resisted wine even when greatly tempted. Taking inspiration from this story the founders of the International Order of Rechabites opened their first Tent (or branch) on the 25th August 1835 in Salford. I actually knew a Rechabite, Lily Bishop, who was signed up as a child and never drank alcohol.

For Christians it became a distinctive of their faith. Drink became demonised, it became the demon drink, it became frowned at, a sin to partake in it. I went to a Baptist church where they had grape juice, not fermented wine, in the separate communion glasses. They ran out of this non-fermented wine one Sunday, so a “deacon” friend of mine, went home, got a bottle of Sherry and no one noticed the difference. They had forgotten or didn’t care about the original rule in the church.

But what they didn’t say was that drink was not a sin, it was the attitude of the person towards the drink that was sinful. There is no sin in the inanimate object of a bottle containing alcohol, only sin in the attitude of a person towards it. They had invented a new sin, and what was meant to cheer the heart became sinful, *Psa 104:14 You let the earth produce grass for cattle, plants for our food, Psa 104:15 wine to cheer us up, olive oil for our skin, and grain for our health.* CEV.

The Christians were seen by many as being starchy, killjoys, spoil sports, and this sort of behaviour does not win friends, because it puts the unbeliever under the same constraints as a believer. You just cannot do this because, *1Co 2:14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are*

foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. 1Co 2:15 But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. The unbeliever cannot be shackled to the believer.

Now I am not saying the society does not require certain laws which limit its excesses, curb its nastiness to its weaker members, but it is not for Christians to legislate on these issues for unbelievers. Paul concentrates on the believer's behaviour not on the unbeliever's behaviour. The believer has the spirit of Christ which, if he is a believer, and the Spirit will moderate him from the inside.

It is also wrong to demonise something that God did not call a sin. We have enough to do without inventing sins. We do not want to portray Christianity as a negative, "thou shalt not" religion, *2Co 1:18 But as God is true, our word toward you was not yea and nay. 2Co 1:19 For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea. 2Co 1:20 For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us*. It is positive and positively directing us to Jesus.

Some Christians don't like to discuss their sin, it's like discussing sex, or nudity because it embarrasses them. They like to be seen as good upright people and perhaps are just not capable of discussing it, and the things that they don't want to discuss, they call, "sins". This head in the sand attitude means that we seldom discuss sin and the result is we have an attitude of false holiness, where silence on the subject of sin is taken for righteousness instead of an inability to deal with sin.

The Christian must acknowledge sin, *Psa 51:2 Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Psa 51:3 For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Psa 51:4 Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest*. With this open attitude to sin, we might be able to do something about it.

We should be honest about our sin. We should never adopt the hypocritical attitude that says that our sins are all removed from our lives, because we lie and do not speak the truth. We should stop pretending that we are superior to the "sinner", because we are not, but we do acknowledge the Saviour Jesus. We are no better than a sinner but more fortunate to have found Jesus.

Confession of personal sin, which is extremely rare in people who say that they have been forgiven, but can't always seem to remember what they have been forgiven of, may sometimes appear as something that they are proud of. On the contrary, sin is ugly, it makes you vulnerable, it is unforgettable but forgivable, and we say, *Rom 7:24 O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the*

body of this death? Rom 7:25 I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

30..... The Problem of Taking a Believer to Court

Preparatory reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 6 verses 1 to 8.

1Co 6:1 When one of you has a complaint against another, do you take your complaint to a court of sinners? Or do you take it to God's people? 1Co 6:2 Don't you know that God's people will judge the world? And if you are going to judge the world, can't you settle small problems? 1Co 6:3 Don't you know that we will judge angels? And if that is so, we can surely judge everyday matters. 1Co 6:4 Why do you take everyday complaints to judges who are not respected by the church? CEV. This shows that the Corinthian believers do not see any difference between believers and unbelievers, since they treat them the same when it comes to a legal dispute. They think that the Christians and unbelievers have the same mindset when it comes to judging and that they judge in the same way.

It also shows the tension that was in the assembly and how legal redress was sought, possibly between the Jews and the Greeks. It is a sad thing to see following on from a commitment to Jesus who has forgiven them their sins and expects them to be of a same mind, *Mat 18:15 If one of my followers sins against you, go and point out what was wrong. But do it in private, just between the two of you. If that person listens, you have won back a follower. Mat 18:16 But if that one refuses to listen, take along one or two others. The Scriptures teach that every complaint must be proven true by two or more witnesses. Mat 18:17 If the follower refuses to listen to them, report the matter to the church. Anyone who refuses to listen to the church must be treated like an unbeliever or a tax collector.*

The first thing we should do in a dispute is have the courage to tell the offender to his face, the nature of the offence, and to do it privately. Escalating the matter by bringing it to the attention of others will make it more difficult to resolve. But taking the matter to law with unbelieving lawyers is condemned. Paul does not mean that the unbelievers are incapable of making a fair settlement nor were they always unjust in their decisions, or that you couldn’t get a fair trial, but they were different to believers, and this is his point.

The idea that this was instigated by the Greeks, the Gentile Christians, is quite possible since the Jews would not let matters be tried by Gentiles in a court of law, and this principle would have come down into the assembly, The differences between the Jewish Christians and the Greek Christians would have been quite profound at the start of this assembly. The Jews had been schooled in morality

their whole lives, whereas the Greeks were new to this restriction on their behaviour. Because of Corinth's sordid reputation, a new Greek word was coined, *korinthiazomai*, which meant "to live immorally like a Corinthian", and the Jews must have looked down upon the Greeks for their lack of morals. Here was one area of conflict.

Because of the mixed background of the church in Corinth, food was another area of conflict and concern. Jews had strict dietary laws while Gentiles did not. Meat sold in the marketplace may have been sacrificed to an idol before being sold. Could a Christian eat that meat? And how should a Christian respond to a fellow believer who holds a different opinion? Paul says that the Christian is free to eat anything as long as he is not actively participating in idol worship. However, if one Christian's freedom causes spiritual harm to another believer by enticing him to do something against his conscience, Paul says the Christian should voluntarily curtail his freedom for the sake of his fellow Christian.

The favouritism towards Paul, Apollos, and Cephas was probably among the Jewish members of the Corinthian assembly rather than the Greek members. The Jews were the ones who had an appreciation for the finer points of the law, *Act 18:24 And a certain* ***Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures****, came to Ephesus*. The Greeks would not have made any discernment of the teaching because they wouldn't have known the law. Certainly, Paul would have had his work cut out in bringing the two factions of believers together.

So he sets before them a higher challenge to get both sides thinking about the issue of going to a human court of law, *1Co 6:2 Don't you know that God's people will judge the world? And if you are going to judge the world, can't you settle small problems? 1Co 6:3 Don't you know that we will judge angels? And if that is so, we can surely judge everyday matters*. CEV. We shall judge the world and we shall judge the angels.

We had all of us thought that we were going to stand before God on the day of judgement and be judged, so what does the Apostles mean when he says, "**We shall judge the world**"? Where does this idea come from? It seems to come from the Wisdom of Solomon, *Wis 3:7 And in the time of their visitation they shall shine, and run to and fro like sparks among the stubble. Wis 3:8* ***They shall judge the nations****, and have dominion over the people, and their Lord shall reign for ever*. The "apocryphal" books were included in the 1611 KJV, and they have been quoted in the New Testament. For example, compare Romans 1 and Wisdom 13. However, I will not digress further at this time.

In Daniel, *Dan 7:17 These great beasts, which are four, are four kings, which shall arise out of the earth. Dan 7:18 But the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever*, the

same thought is given of the Saints possessing the kingdom and by inference ruling and judging over it. Having this great thought in mind, *1Co 6:3 Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?* CEV. If I have the responsibility of judging in righteousness, this world and the world to come, then surely I can judge "*things that pertain to this life"?*

It seems to me that Christians do not get judged on the Day of Judgement, *Rom 8:1 For this cause those who are in Christ Jesus will not be judged as sinners. Rom 8:2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death*. BBE. Let me clarify that statement, we do not get judged to condemnation, *2Co 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad*. That which he receives is according to his works, *1Co 3:12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; 1Co 3:13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. 1Co 3:14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. 1Co 3:15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire*.

As a result of this thought, instead of going to court with the unjust, I should set up a court of children, a court of the least esteemed not the greatest, to do this, *1Co 6:4 If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church*. Paul is calling the ordinary members of the assembly to be judges in these matters, to show that the Christians have more important matters to deal with. Let the simple Christians deal with worldly things, because we have more important matters to deal with, like the judgement of the world.

Unfortunately, we are too concerned for this life and for our "reputations" in this life, we do not think about the world to come, what it will be like, and its greater glory. We puddle around in the dirt of this world as if the things we do here are of lasting glory, and monuments will be set up to us for the great things we have done. Brethren let me tell you a great truth, every listed building will be destroyed, every memorial to the greatness of kings and emperors will be burned as so much rubbish, every little reminder of how great we thought we were, shall be swept into the fire of oblivion, *1Co 1:19 For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. 1Co 1:20 Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 1Co 1:21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe*. Whether you want a cremation or a burial, you are going to get a cremation.

Picking at matters, however great or small, with the people who are unbelievers, who are adjudicating, who are going to hell, is not the way we should work, *1Co 6:7 When one of you takes another to court, all of you lose. It would be better to let yourselves be cheated and robbed.1Co 6:8 But instead, you cheat and rob other followers*. CEV. It is a lesson in going to law, and it is a lesson in the nature of our hearts towards Jesus. We see ourselves from the divine perspective if we really take Him seriously.

How does Jesus see us? As immature squabbling brats, who would sooner have a party than a sermon, who would sooner be seen by the world as successful rather than be successful in the things of God, and we indulge in the sins of the world, while hypocritically turning to Jesus when the number of sins dangerously overflows. Yes, God sees your heart just as well as He saw the hearts of the people before He destroyed the old world, *Gen 6:5 And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*.

We are thick, thick in the head, to ever imagine that we can keep our sins hidden, or to justify them to ourselves, to say, “it will not matter this once” if I commit this sin. We drastically overestimate our state before God, if we think we have His favour whilst the evil in us, is bubbling up and marring all we do. As David prayed, *1Ch 29:17 I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things: and now have I seen with joy thy people, which are present here, to offer willingly unto thee. 1Ch 29:18 O LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this forever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people, and prepare their heart unto thee*:

Look says the Apostle, you don’t fool me and you certainly don’t fool the Almighty, *1Co 6:9 Don't you know that evil people won't have a share in the blessings of God's kingdom? Don't fool yourselves! No one who is immoral or worships idols or is unfaithful in marriage or is a pervert or behaves like a homosexual 1Co 6:10 will share in God's kingdom. Neither will any thief or greedy person or drunkard or anyone who curses and cheats others. 1Co 6:11 Some of you used to be like that. But now the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and the power of God's Spirit have washed you and made you holy and acceptable to God*. CEV.

You say, I don’t **DO** any of that. No perhaps you don’t **DO** any of that but do you **THINK** of it? You see, with Jesus, because He has different ears to us, He hears what we say and **what we thin**k. Our thoughts may be silent to us but they are not to God, *Rom 8:26 In certain ways we are weak, but the Spirit is here to help us. For example, when we don't know what to pray for, the Spirit prays for us in ways that cannot be put into words. Rom 8:27 All of our thoughts are known to*

God. He can understand what is in the mind of the Spirit, as the Spirit prays for God's people. CEV.

In that inner darkness of the soul, we commit first of all, the crime, which starts as a thought and eventually it breaks out into the physical world to become an actuality. From thought to deed, *Mat 9:4 And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts*? Jesus saw into that chasm of the heart, the thoughts of the men and it showed what they really thought of Him, but would not express openly.

Jesus knew what was in men and women, and He knew the deceit that they practiced, *Mat 5:27 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: Mat 5:28 But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart*. They and us are fooling ourselves if we think that we can go on in the world's ways, and get away with it, "***Don't fool yourselves! No one who is immoral or worships idols or is unfaithful in marriage or is a pervert or behaves like a homosexual will share in God's kingdom***". Don't think that because you think that you have made a profession of faith that it counts for anything, without the moral changes inside of you.

Yes, that right, without the changes we are not getting in the kingdom, changing from greed to generosity, changing from idolatry in all its forms to worshiping the Lord, changing from being a thief and taking from others, to giving to others, changing from a person who cannot control himself through drink or some other cause, to a man who governs his life under God, changing from the sexually permissive, the homosexual, the fornicator, the adulterer, to the faithful person in control of his life, changing from the liar who has no regard for truth to the honest man. These and many more changes we must make, if we are to get home with Jesus.

And this matter of going to law against your fellow believer is just one of those things which can cause you to fall. You don't think it is all that bad? We will see who is right as the day of Christ arrives.

31..... The Problem of Fornication

Preparatory reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 6 verses 15 to 20.

1Co 6:12 All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. 1Co 6:13 Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for

the body. Paul seems to be obsessed by this subject of fornication and for a good reason, because it was among the sins which led to the destruction of the fledgling nation of Israel just as it threatens to destroy the fledgling Corinthian assembly, just as it is destroying the churches today.

Later on in the letter to the Corinthians Paul reminds them of the Old Testament History of Israel, *1Co 10:1 Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; 1Co 10:2 And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 1Co 10:3 And did all eat the same spiritual meat; 1Co 10:4 And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. 1Co 10:5 But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. 1Co 10:6 Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. 1Co 10:7 Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. 1Co 10:8* ***Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.*** *1Co 10:9 Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. 1Co 10:10 Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. 1Co 10:11 Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come*.

The Corinthians were guilty of the same sins as Israel and they would have the same outcome if they persisted in their ways. Although the Israelites had partaken of Christ in a manner of speaking, "*And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ*", but they still perished. It's hard to think that you can partake of Christ, make a profession of faith, go around with "believers and yet perish, but they perished because they did not live up to what they had signed up to.

There were many sins that Israel committed, and among them was fornication, in particular with the Moabite nation, *Num 25:1 While the Israelites were camped at Acacia, some of the men had sex with Moabite women. Num 25:2 These women then invited the men to ceremonies where sacrifices were offered to their gods. The men ate the meat from the sacrifices and worshiped the Moabite gods. Num 25:3 The LORD was angry with Israel because they had worshiped the god Baal Peor.*CEV.
It wasn't just that they had sex, it led on to eating meat that was sacrificed to idols, and full blown worship to the god Baalpeor, or the lord of prophecy. This was the particular sin that Paul mentions.

It led to a horrendous purging of the fornicators, some 24,000 people, *Num 25:7 And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it,*

he rose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand; Num 25:8 And he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her belly. So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel. Num 25:9 And those that died in the plague were ***twenty and four thousand***. It was a massive outbreak of fornication, in the flesh and in the spirit.

Just a note on the numbers killed, Dr Gill explains why the numbers are different between the Old Testament and the New Testament,

> Moses and the apostle use different words in their account; Moses says there died so many, including the heads of the people that were hanged up against the sun, and all that perished by the sword; the apostle says, that there fell such a number, referring only to the latter, who only could be properly said to fall, and not those that were hanged up: *Num 25:4 And the LORD said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the LORD against the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may be turned away from Israel. Num 25:5 And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, Slay ye everyone his men that were joined unto Baalp*eor.
>
> Now the heads of the people that suffered the first kind of death, might, as is very probable, be a **thousand**; and they that died in the other way, **three and twenty thousand**, which make the sums to agree, and both are expressed by Moses, under the general name of a plague or stroke; to all this, that the apostle uses a limiting clause, which Moses does not, and says that these **three and twenty thousand** fell in one day. So that it is very likely that the heads of the people, supposed to be a thousand, were hanged up in one day; and the three and twenty thousand that fell by the sword died the next, which the apostle only takes notice of. Hence the Jew has no reason to charge the apostle with an error.

I observe that it was the men of Israel which committed the crime and the men died as a result, along with an unknown number of Moabitish and Midianite women. In this day and age Over 1 in 3 (35%) married men are stepping outside of marriage by having sexual affairs, and 1 in 6 (17%) married women are cheating on their spouses. Showing no favouritism, affairs are infecting Christian marriages at the same rate as it is crippling marriages nationwide (Sept 2014).

"The rate of extramarital affairs appears to have a correlation to frequency of viewing pornography," according to Joel Hesch, who sponsored the survey and is the founder of Proven Men Ministries. "A married person who views porn several times a month is ripe to have an affair. Specifically, another part of the survey showed that 40% of married men watch porn at least several times a month, which compares to 35% of married men having affairs. Similarly, 22% of married

women view porn at least several times a month and 17% of married women have affairs. The survey also shows that twice as many married men have affairs as married women, which corresponds to twice as many married men watching porn as married women." It is getting to the same degree as in the Old Testament, epidemic.

Paul observes what will happen to people who commit fornication, *1Co 6:13 Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. 1Co 6:14 And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power. 1Co 6:15 Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid.*

The Lord will **NOT** raise up fornicators from the dead to life with Christ. It is just wrong to think that it is alright to practice fornication, but sadly, you will find out the proof of this great truth at the resurrection. They are separated by God from a life with Jesus because they love the sin more than the Saviour. Fornication tests us to see if we are faithful to Christ and it tests us in a number of ways.

The word πορνεία = porneia, refers to any and all sexual activity that happens outside the context of God's design of marriage including, but not restricted to, pornography, extramarital sexual intercourse, or any other sexual activity that does not honour Christ. The Apostle warned the Ephesians that, *Eph 5:3 But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Eph 5:4 Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks*. This provides an image for us that broadens the meaning of the term to include even how we speak to one another.

It also covers the "spiritual" side of fornication, *Num 25:1 While the Israelites were camped at Acacia, some of the men had sex with Moabite women. Num 25:2 These women then invited the men to ceremonies where sacrifices were offered to their gods. The men ate the meat from the sacrifices and* ***worshiped the Moabite gods****.* The physical aspect of fornication led them into another sin, "*The men ate the meat from the sacrifices and worshiped the Moabite gods".*

The idea of "safe sex" among the world is different from the Lord's idea. "Safe sex" is used by worldly people to mean to take precautions when having sexual relations in order to prevent the female from conceiving a child. God's view drastically deviates from that idea. With God, "safe sex" would involve,

a. never sleep with anyone before you get married and
b. after you get married, sleep only with your own spouse, who also maintains the same level of purity.

c. don’t have anything to do with, *Eph 5:5 Being greedy, indecent, or immoral is just another way of worshiping idols. You can be sure that people who behave in this way will never be part of the kingdom that belongs to Christ and to God*. CEV.

For both spiritual and physical aspects, God’s mindset about “safe sex” is what every wise person chooses.

One of the things that we do when looking to interpret scripture, is to start from the bottom and work our way up to God, a bottom up approach. We start by raking around in the world and we try to find a meaning that will bring us an understanding of the particular scripture and then apply it in our relationship with God. I am going to suggest to you that you do the exact opposite. For instance, with trying to get a meaning out of “fornication”, do not look initially at the events which you think make up “fornication” but look at it from Jesus perspective. See how the prohibitions on relationships came about from Jesus point of view, see how He feels about relationships and what He intended that they should mean. After all, He gave these laws, they proceeded from the mind of God, He thought them out before man was ever created and He had a plan and intentions through them.

This is a principle that I would recommend when studying all Scripture. Look at the subject you are studying from Christ’s position first. If you are having difficulty in understanding what is being taught, try to explore it from Jesus’ point of view and that will get you nearer the meaning, after all, Scriptures have their true meaning and reality in Jesus, *Col 2:16 So let no one make rules about what you eat or drink or about holy days or the New Moon Festival or the Sabbath. Col 2:17 All such things are only a shadow of things in the future; the reality is Christ*. GNB.

From the Lord’s point of view, He wants loyalty in His worship. Anything which takes that away from worship is fornication. We do not have to try and figure all the details about what constitutes fornication, what relationships are right or wrong, what the degrees of consanguinity are, to ask the questions that make up another book like the Midrash, where we get to look up all the details (some manmade ideas) to get an idea of the Law. We can see clearly that anything which interferes with our relationship to Him, our single minded loyalty to Him, in a word, our faithfulness to Him is just plain wrong.

He shows us His nature by giving us His laws. He shows the relationship that He wants with each of us, His creatures, by showing us the relationships that we have with each other. Fornication is just one of the relationships that He shows us. He shows us the loyalty we should have, by the relationship between two people who love one another, who are devoted to one another, who do not cheat on one another, who continue through this life, faithful unto death. At death, the

relationship ceases in earthly terms and Jesus relationship with us come to the fore. We neither marry nor are given in marriage but shall be as the angels.

For the Corinthians, this will require some time to understand as they are babies, *1Co 6:16 What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. 1Co 6:17 But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. 1Co 6:18 Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body*. It is enough for now to see that fornication is sinning against your own body, defiling it and your relationship with Jesus.

Jesus see your body as the Temple of God, a temple of the Holy Spirit which resides in us, *1Co 6:19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? 1Co 6:20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's*.

That is something we have to live up to, if the Spirit of God dwells in us.

32..... The Problem of Marriage

Preparatory reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 7 verses 1 to 40.

We have talked about fornication and seen that you never sleep with anyone before you get married and after you get married sleep only with your own spouse, and also don't have anything to do with being greedy, indecent, or immoral which is just another way of worshiping idols. Looking for the reason, we find it in Jesus. From the Lord's point of view, He wants loyalty in His worship. Anything which takes that away from worship is fornication. We do not have to try and figure all the details about what constitutes fornication, what relationships are right or wrong, what the degrees of consanguinity are, to ask the questions that make up another book like the Midrash, where we get to look up all the details (some manmade ideas) to get an idea of the Law. We can see clearly that anything which interferes with our relationship to Him, our single minded loyalty to Him, in a word, our faithfulness to Him is just plain wrong.

Now we turn to "marriage" and we see straight away that the word is not used in the Old Testament in the way we use it now and there was initially no ritual that defined marriage. In Hebrew and Greek there is no word for "husband", in the Law. Instead, the Bible uses two words to refer to husbands and these words can refer to men that are not husbands, as well, *Gen 2:23 And the man said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Gen 2:24 Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his woman: and they shall be one*

flesh. Gen 2:25 And they were both naked, the man and his woman, and were not ashamed. Cepher. No mention of marriage there, no mention of a ceremony, no mention of a religious service, yet this act has been subsumed by the State and by the clergy, to dictate to you, what a marriage is.

God joined the two people together and just what that means we shall look into, *Mat 19:3 The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? Mat 19:4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, Mat 19:5 And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Mat 19:6 Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh.* ***What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder***.

In the Hebrew of the Old Testament husbands are often referred to as אִישׁ = ish which means a male human being and the New Testament also uses the Greek equivalent word for male which is ἀνδρὸς = andros to refer to men. In other words, one of the ways to refer to a woman's husband in ancient times was simply to refer to him as "her man". The second word which the Bible uses is the word בַּעַל = baal and it is used 15 times in the Old Testament to refer to a woman's husband. The Hebrew word "baal" means "master/owner". There is also an adverbial use of "baal" which means "owned". The word is used to refer to masters, home owners, a pagan deity and to husbands.

Deu 22:22 If a man be found lying with a woman ***married to an husband*** *(* **בעלת־בעל** *), then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel.* It might be rendered "husband owner". Abraham was Baal over Sarah, *Gen 20:3 But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife (* **בעלת־בעל***).*

In Isaiah, *Isa 62:4 Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land* ***Beulah (***בעולה***) for the LORD delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married (***תבעל*),* Beulah means to be married or under lordship. Clearly this is a pointer to Christ, *Eph 5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.*

The woman was subject to the man as her Lord, and where she did not yet have a man, she was subject to her father, *Exo 22:16 And if a man entice a virgin that is not betrothed, and lie with her, he shall surely endow her to be his woman. Exo 22:17* ***If her father utterly refuse to give her*** *unto him, he shall pay money according to the dowry of virgins*. The father sanctioned the marriage, not a state representative, not a member of a religious order, it was

her father who called the shots, so to speak. He was acting under God to assess the suitability, or not, of the man.

In Hebrew and Greek there is no word for wife, the woman can be what we have come to call, a "wife", she can also be a servant, concubine, sister, niece, cousin, aunt, mother, grand-mother or other female near of kin. Jehovah it seems, wants all women in His kingdom to have a man in their life whom she serves, but the man shows his love by exercising faithful lordship. I think that this is what Paul meant when he said, *1Ti 2:12 But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence*. The man assumes his position and the woman assents to it.

In the Greek, the word for woman is γυνή = gune, whence you get derivatives in our language, such as **gynecological,** relating to the branch of physiology and medicine which deals with the functions and diseases specific to women and girls, especially those affecting the reproductive system. These include the uterus, ovaries, fallopian tubes, external genitalia, and breasts. That puts it quite clearly, that a woman only can have **gyne**cological problems, not a man, by definition. Those who think a male can be a woman are seriously bonkers.

The woman came out of the man, and God cloned her. Professor-Dr Arthur E. Wilder-Smith (1915–1995) is right: "God cloned Adam's DNA to make Eve. But there is one obvious difference in their genetics because of their different sex, different sex chromosomes. Women have two X chromosomes, whereas men have an X and a Y chromosome. The Y chromosome thus specifies maleness. So Wilder-Smith proposed that God destroyed Adam's Y and doubled his X, to generate the female XX configuration".

Gen 2:22 And the rib, which Jehovah Elohim had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. Gen 2:23 And the man said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Gen 2:24 Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his woman: and they shall be one flesh. Gen 2:25 And they were both naked, the man and his woman, and were not ashamed.

The act of God which "*brought her unto the man*", is I think, the act of joining the woman to the man. Eve came from Adam and was joined back to him by God, so that "*they shall be one flesh*". This is curious. Why would the Lord take out and separate the woman from the man then rejoin the two, man and woman as "*one flesh*"? At present, I would say that it shows Christ's union with His bride, *Eph 5:30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. Eph 5:31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and* ***they two shall be one flesh****. Eph 5:32* ***This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church***.

What makes a man and a woman a bona fide, genuine couple, as opposed to an adulterous, or fornicating couple, is stated in Malachi, *Mal 2:14 Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because **Jehovah** has been witness between you and the woman of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously: yet is she your companion, and the woman of your covenant.* Cepher. Dr Gill comments,

> **Because the Lord hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth**: when espoused together in their youthful days, the Lord was present at that solemn contract, and saw the obligations they were laid under to each other, and he was called upon by both parties to be a witness of the same; and at the present time he was a witness how agreeably the wives of the Israelites had behaved towards their husbands, and how treacherously they had acted towards them; he saw and knew, that, whatever pretensions they made, they did not love them, nor behave as they should towards them; and therefore had just cause of complaint against them, and must be a witness for the one, and against the other: this sin of hating and divorcing their wives, or of marrying others besides them, which prevailed much in our Lord's time, is particularly mentioned, though they were guilty of many other sins, as a reason of the Lord's not accepting their offerings: the aggravations of it are, that they had broken a contract God was witness to, and dealt injuriously with wives they had espoused in the days of their youth; *Pro 2:16 To deliver thee from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words; Pro 2:17 Which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God*.

So there is no word in either the Old Testament Hebrew or the New Testament Koine Greek for "husband" or "wife." The word used is "man" or "woman." A woman has a "man" and a man has a "woman," plain and simple. *Rom 7:2 For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband*. It is better translated, “For the woman, under a man, is bound to her man as long as he is alive but if the man is dead, she is loosed from the law of her man”.

The relationship, and it is sad that we have to emphasise this, you will observe, is between a man and a woman, not a man and a man, or a woman and woman, or any of those “alphabet” sexes, LGBTQIA. The scriptures are so specific that instead or using the term husband or wife, which can today be used of a “female husband” or a “male wife” in a homosexual relationship, the Scripture uses the exact gender of the persons, male and female, to define the exact relationship set up by God.

Marriage is a concept that requires a biblical explanation, *Rom 7:3 So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man*. More correctly it should read from the original, “if while her man lives and she becomes another’s, she shall be called an adulteress, but if her man is dead she is free from that law, so that she is not an adulteress, though she belongs to a different man”. The commitment to one man to one woman makes a biblical relationship. Straying outside of that relationship is adultery, and unlawful sex where one party is not in a legitimate relationship is fornication. God does not support the “alphabet sexes”, LGBTQIA, as legitimate relationships.

We are now in a position to examine what Paul says, and not what the KJV says, *1Co 7:1 Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. 1Co 7:2 Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own woman, and let every woman have her own man. 1Co 7:3 Let the man render unto the woman due benevolence: and likewise also the woman unto the man. 1Co 7:4 The woman hath not power of her own body, but the man: and likewise also the man hath not power of his own body, but the woman*.

He is saying, *1Co 7:2 Well, having your own man or woman should keep you from doing something immoral. 1Co 7:3 Men and women should be fair with each other about having sex. 1Co 7:4 A woman belongs to her man instead of to herself, and a man belongs to his woman instead of to himself. 1Co 7:5 So don't refuse sex to each other, unless you agree not to have sex for a little while, in order to spend time in prayer. Then Satan won't be able to tempt you because of your lack of self-control.* The relationship that is developed by the two people will stop the temptation of fornication, it will also stop the act of sex being used for selfish reasons.

The Bible never looks upon the sex act between men and women as dirty, something that is unclean, a thing that is done in dark rooms because it is a sin. Only the people who confuse the original sin of Adam with the act of sex, have this prudish attitude that you cannot talk about sex. But look here, Paul is talking quite openly and rationally about sex. He says that to avoid fornication you should get a women or a man. If a man or a woman cannot commit to one another to be together permanently, have the agreement of the father, be in a covenant relationship, then whatever the relationship that they develop, it is fornication.

That should answer all the questions relating to sexual encounters, for example, imagine a Christian man and woman (both unmarried) on a date and alone together, at his place or her place, with their emotions and hormones in high gear. If they kiss, is that a sin? If they're fully clothed and they fondle each other,

is that a sin? If they take off their clothes and cuddle in bed, is that a sin? If they give each other oral sex, is that a sin? If they use sex toys on each other, is that a sin? The New Testament doesn't mention any of these specific scenarios, and they're not "worldly" issues as people sometimes claim, but instead they're real issues that affect unmarried Christians who are dating. But under our definition of relationships, they are all sinful outside of God given commitment and God's way of doing things. And the act is committed first in the heart not in the bed, and no amount of casuistry can hide unlawful lust.

As we have said before, Jesus is the position where we start to get our meaning of anything and everything from, E*ph 5:22 Women, submit yourselves unto your own men, as unto the Lord. Eph 5:23 For the man is the head of the women, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Eph 5:24 Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the women be to their own men in everything. Eph 5:25 men, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; Eph 5:26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, Eph 5:27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. Eph 5:28 So ought men to love their women as their own bodies. He that loveth his woman loveth himself*.

The final goal of that relationship is between Christ and His people, Jesus and the Church, the Bride of Christ, *Eph 5:31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his woman, and they two shall be one flesh. Eph 5:32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Eph 5:33 Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his woman even as himself; and the woman see that she fear her man*.

We go from the earth, to Adam and **out** of Adam, and thence to death, *1Co 15:22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive*. In Christ Jesus, the Church is taken from death, made alive in Christ, taken into Jesus such that we are **in** Christ, and that is a complete reversal, it is from sin to salvation.

33..... The Problem of Divorce

Preparatory reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 7 verses 1 to 40.

Having stated what marriage is, we can now look at what we call divorce, which is the legal dissolution of marriage. You have to have marriage, the joining together of one man and one woman before you can talk of divorce. *1Co 7:10 I instruct married couples to stay together, and this is exactly what the Lord himself taught. A woman who leaves her man 1Co 7:11 should either stay single or go back to her man. And a man should not leave his woman.*

The first use of the word divorce was in *Deu 24:1 When a man has taken a woman, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favor in his eyes, because he has found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house*. It was Moses, the lawgiver who implemented divorce, *Mat 19:8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. Mat 19:9 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery*.

If a man didn't like a woman, for whatever trivial reason, perhaps she burned his toast, or didn't have his dinner ready, or there was a more serious reason such as withholding conjugal rights, he could divorce her. Over time the rabbis looked at these two passages (Deut 24 and Ex 21) as the classic Scriptural texts governing divorce. They said: Based on these texts, marriage involves a vow, and those vows include three primary promises: 1) Fidelity. To be faithful, and that there be no sexual unfaithfulness (Deuteronomy 24); 2) Provision. To provide food, clothing, and other basic needs (Exodus 21); and 3) Affection. Sexual intimacy and conjugal love.

But the root of divorce is selfishness. One's own preferences and priorities gradually overtook that aim of providing the other person's needs first. An African lady told me that they didn't like some African men, because they were very attentive when courting the woman, they would dress neatly and smell nice, but when they got married, they would loaf around the house all day in a vest and underpants, drinking beer. A man told me just before I married, "that you could eat your wife when you first got married and after a few months, you wish that you had". You see, with those attitudes prevailing, marriages do not have any goal but the pleasure of one party over another, in short selfishness, and as that is rooted in us, it is surprising that any marriage works.

This highlights a problem with the Jews which has come down to all humanity, and is a disease of the heart, namely the "hardness of heart" as Jesus called it. The word σκληροκαρδία = sklērokardia, is literally sclerosis of the heart, the non-functioning of the heart. Metaphorically speaking, there was a problem with their heart. It did not function normally, it was constricted, it was restricted, it wasn't expansive, a great heart or a whole heart. The Jew who was attentive to the word of God was said to have a "whole heart", *Psa 119:10 With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments……..Psa 119:2 Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart……..Psa 119:34 Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart…….. Psa 119:69 The proud have forged a lie against me: but I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart.*

So it was because of a hard heart that the Jews received a concession from Moses, they could get divorced, but it wasn't like this in the days of creation, and Jesus rebukes the disciples, "*And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery*". That means that Jesus is telling them that divorce, except for one reason, leads to adultery. Fornication that leads to adultery is the one "escape clause". Adultery is a sin, and people who do that are not fit citizens of the kingdom of God, *1Co 6:9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, 1Co 6:10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God*. They will not get to heaven if those sins are present with them, in thought or in deed. That said, the person whose partner commits adultery still has it in their power to forgive.

Why then did Moses even let them have an, "any cause" divorce, when he was clearly condoning a sin? Well, it was the lesser of two evils, if I may put it that way, if he had not given the concession, then it would have created a very bitter society, and hatred between men and women would have increased, so to ameliorate the selfish condition, caused by a hard heart, he "suffered" them to put away their wives. Moses law was to regulate a civil society, not a heavenly society. The heavenly society which the Jews could aspire to, had another lawgiver, Jesus, and He showed that the law of Moses did not apply to His kingdom of heaven, and that if His followers continued like that they would not "*inherit the kingdom of God*". The disciples had a lesson to learn, because they had no faith in Him, before they became converted, *Mar 16:14 Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen*.

The reason that a man and a woman were originally joined up for the duration of life, is because, *Eph 5:31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. Eph 5:32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church*. Marriage gets its meaning from Christ's relationship with the church, which is a relationship of Divine order, not doing what you want but what He wants.

The sin of fornication and adultery are applied to the spiritual conditions of the Old Testament nations of Israel and Judah. These nations are the two parts of the greater nation, which split in two after the time of Solomon, and Jeremiah rebukes them, *Jer 3:6 The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and* ***there hath played the harlot****. Jer 3:7 And I said after she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me.*

But she returned not. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. Jer 3:8 And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also.

Ezekiel uses the same metaphor to describe the apostate nation. Having rescued her from her desperate state, and restored her to himself, as His bride she was beautiful to behold, *Eze 16:6 And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thee own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live. Eze 16:7 I have caused thee to multiply as the bud of the field, and thou hast increased and waxen great, and thou art come to excellent ornaments: thy breasts are fashioned, and thine hair is grown, whereas thou wast naked and bare. Eze 16:8 Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine. Eze 16:9 Then washed I thee with water; yea, I throughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee. Eze 16:10 I clothed thee also with broidered work, and shod thee with badgers' skin, and I girded thee about with fine linen, and I covered thee with silk. Eze 16:11 I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands, and a chain on thy neck*.

But like the Corinthians and other Christians that walk contrary, she went against her Lord, *Eze 16:30 How weak is thine heart, saith the Lord GOD, seeing thou doest all these things, the work of an **imperious whorish woman**; Eze 16:31 In that thou buildest thine eminent place in the head of every way, and makest thine high place in every street; and hast not been as an harlot, in that thou scornest hire; Eze 16:32 But as a wife that committeth adultery, which taketh strangers instead of her husband*! This is a good description of many churches, because no sooner are they rescued, they become an "***imperious whorish woman***", and sad to say, many people in the churches are like that. In my opinion, Christians are the worst hypocrites when it comes to the relationship that they should have to Christ. Outwardly they put on a good show but that is all it is. When it comes to doing the masters will, she shows herself to be a harlot. To those persons it says, *Heb 13:4 Have respect for marriage. Always be faithful to your partner, because God will punish anyone who is immoral or unfaithful in marriage*. CEV.

There is to be no divorce among Christians, but if there is a cause for leaving the husband, the woman should not remarry but stay single, and this applies to a man leaving his wife, *1Co 7:10 I instruct married couples to stay together, and this is exactly what the Lord himself taught. A woman who leaves her man 1Co 7:11 should either stay single or go back to her man. And a man should not leave his woman.* They either stay single or reconcile their difference.

Paul has another thing to say about marriage, and it concerns “marriage” to unbelievers, *1Co 7:12 I don't know of anything else the Lord said about marriage. All I can do is to give you my own advice. If your woman isn't a follower of the Lord, but is willing to stay with you, don't divorce her. 1Co 7:13 If your man isn't a follower, but is willing to stay with you, don't divorce him.* Whatever brought this unequal yoke about, it is however, regarded before the Lord as a marriage, and divorce is not an option. Since divorce is mentioned, they must be regarded as a married couple. As such the couple are urged to make a go of it, but it will always have that tension in the relationship.

The man or woman who is an unbeliever is sanctified or made holy, by the believing partner, *1Co 7:14 Your man or woman who isn't a follower is made holy by having you as a mate. This also makes your children holy and keeps them from being unclean in God's sight.*

As Dr Gill says,

> **by the believing husband**; this is a reason given by the apostle why they should live together. This cannot be understood of internal sanctification, which is never the case; an unbeliever cannot be sanctified by a believer in this sense, for such a sanctification is only by the Spirit of God; nor external sanctification, or an outward reformation, which though the unbelieving yoke fellow may sometimes be a means of, yet not always; and besides, the usefulness of one to another in such a relation, in a spiritual sense, urged as a reason for living together, in *1Co 7:16 For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?* nor merely of the holiness of marriage, as it is an institution of God, which is equally the same in unbelievers as believers, or between a believer and an unbeliever, as between two believers; but of the very act of marriage, which, in the language of the Jews, is expressed by being "sanctified";

So in conclusion, *1Co 7:15 If your man or woman isn't a follower of the Lord and decides to divorce you, then you should agree to it. You are no longer bound to that person. After all, God chose you and wants you to live at peace. 1Co 7:16 And besides, how do you know if you will be able to save your man or woman who isn't a follower*? CEV.

Men and women do not seek to find out what God requires of them. In fact many of the Christians know a lot more about the Argos catalogue, Computer weekly, Which? Magazine or Amazon, than they do about what constitutes a biblical relationship from Scripture. They just cannot be bothered to find out about it because it does not seem important to them. They think that they have gotten the bit that counts, forgiveness, and that covers any mistakes that they make, by

neglect or design, and this indolent attitude will be overcome on the last day by a loving God.

Good luck if you believe that because God says, *Hos 4:6* ***My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge****: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children. Hos 4:7 As they were increased, so they sinned against me: therefore will I change their glory into shame. Hos 4:8 They eat up the sin of my people, and they set their heart on their iniquity*.

That's the risk you take by not being informed or being ill informed. You make your mind up about relationships, gender, divorce, fornication and what comes of them, in this life. Then you answer to God for what you believe. I don't get any sense that a change of heart or a change of mind will do you any good in the afterlife, after all, seeing sense is one thing and being able to do anything about it is another, as the rich man found out, *Luk 16:24 And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. Luk 16:25 But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. Luk 16:26 And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence*.

34..... The Problem of Idolatrous Sacrifice

Preparatory reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 8 verses 1 to 13

Our next subject of concern for the fledgling church at Corinth is things offered to idols, *1Co 8:1 But concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know, (for we all have knowledge: knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. 1Co 8:2 If any one think he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know it. 1Co 8:3 But if any one love God, *he* is known of him): 1Co 8:4 —concerning then the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God save one*. Darby. It seems slightly clumsily written until you realise that there is a parenthetic phrase in the middle of the first sentence, where Paul says something that occurs to him that is relevant. He puts what he says in "brackets", in parenthesis, and then he continues with what he is saying.

By this I mean that the opening sentence should read, *1Co 8:1 But concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know, 1Co 8:4 —concerning then the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God save one.* The additional thought, "*for we all have*

*knowledge: knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. 1Co 8:2 If any one think he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know it. 1Co 8:3 But if any one love God, *he* is known of him*", is put as a parenthesis, in brackets.

The word that makes up the phrase "of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols" is one word in the Greek, εἰδωλόθυτον = eidōlothuton. This word has two components, the word for "idol" and the word for "sacrifice", a burnt sacrifice, so it means a sacrifice to idols made by fire. Sacrifice to idols was an important subject to the early church, living in a pagan world, and it was something that former Jews saw as non-negotiable, something to be held on to in the new religion of Christianity, and the laid it down at the council of Jerusalem, *Act 15:28 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; Act 15:29 That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well*.

Among the heathen, this was one of the things which they would have nothing to do with, and abstaining from "idol sacrifices" became a distinguishing feature of Christians, *Act 21:25 As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication*. This continued right through the writings of the church, even to Revelation, *Rev 2:20 Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols*.

Idol sacrifice was universally seen as wrong and Christians just don't do it. So why isn't it a cut and dried case, and why does Paul add a bit more reason to it? Like all things it is not as straight forward as it looks. See Paul's method, he doesn't just tell the Corinthians not to do things because he says so. There is reason to all of his arguments and by his reason he hopes to persuade people. The arguments put up by Paul have two parts to them, here in 1 Corinthian 8, where it deals with the weaker brother who is caused to stumble by your eating things sacrificed to idols, *1Co 8:7 Not everyone knows these things. In fact, many people have grown up with the belief that idols have life in them. So when they eat meat offered to idols, they are bothered by a **weak conscience***. CEV.

The second argument in 1 Corinthians 10 looks at the liberty and freedom that we have providing we do not offend the weaker brother, *1Co 10:27 If an unbeliever invites you to dinner, and you want to go, then go. Eat whatever you are served. Don't cause a problem for **someone's conscience** by asking where the food came from*. CEV. And the key to all of this is the conscience, indeed it is the key to many other aspects of Christian life.

Some see the conscience as an infallible guardian of the soul, always putting you right when you would go astray. Wrong. But the conscience can also be "insensitive", "evil" and "defiled", *1Ti 4:2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron*; that is rendered insensitive, cauterised. *Heb 10:22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our* ***hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience****, and our bodies washed with pure water*. Note that the "heart" is the seat of our actions, *Mat 15:18 But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. Mat 15:19* ***For out of the heart proceed*** *evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: Mat 15:20 These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man*. The defiled conscience is seen in, *Tit 1:15 Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled*. That is contaminated.

So you see, the conscience isn't an infallible accompaniment to life, far from it, it may do harm if you conscience is not working. It may be a good conscience, *Act 23:1 And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all* ***good conscience*** *before God until this day*. It may be evil, *Heb 10:22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an* ***evil conscience****, and our bodies washed with pure water*.

How did Paul get his good conscience? He got it by exercising it like an athlete, *Act 24:16 And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men*. I think that Paul exercises his mind by thinking about what he does, and thinking about the consequences, thinking about the good he can do, thinking about the things of Christ, *Php 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Php 4:9 Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you*.

I said that the conscience was part of the heart, that is, the place where sin is planned and from which good also comes. *Pro 4:23 Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life*. The conscience it seem to me, is the "instrument" which is exercised in the heart to guide us. If we exercise the conscience correctly then it will aid us in making the right decisions before God, if we do not exercise it correctly, it will work to condone sin and will make us evil and reprobate. It is like a well trained dog that will guard its master, but if the conscience is not trained it will bite you.

When you train a lot, be it in athletics or music, the brain wires itself up to do the things that you want to do almost without thinking about them, they have

become almost an automatic response. Training has a remarkable effect on the brain and it is called neuroplasticity and refers to our brain remodelling, adapting, and organising after we practice a skill, which is vital for developing skills.

> Your brain forms neuronal connections based on what you do repeatedly in your life – both good and bad. Worrying about every little thing. Cruising online pornography. Picking at your fingernails. Hitting the gym. Meditating. Your repeated mental states, responses, and behaviours become neural traits.
>
> Making or breaking a habit involves neuroplastic change in your brain. A person desires something because their plastic brain has become sensitized to the substance or experience and craves it. When an urge is satisfied, dopamine, a feel-good neurotransmitter, is released. The same shot of dopamine that gives pleasure is also an essential component of neuroplastic change. Dopamine assists in building neuronal connections that reinforce the habit.
>
> The first time you do something, the dopamine reward comes after the event. Each time thereafter, dopamine gets released earlier and earlier until just thinking about something causes an anticipatory dopamine surge. The dopamine preceding the action motivates you to perform the behaviour in the future. Every time you act in the same way, a specific neuronal pattern is stimulated and becomes strengthened in your brain. We know that neurons that fire together wire together. Your brain, being the efficient entity that it is, takes the path of least resistance each time and a habit or full-blown addiction is born.

That is why the Bible says, *Pro 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it*. Paul exercises his faculty of conscience to be a good conscience, he inputs into it all the knowledge of God, the Scripture, so that it will act automatically to be a good conscience, and it will be the "instrument" which is exercised in the heart to guide us. That is why we must exercise it for good if it is to work for good.

Returning to 1 Corinthians chapter 8, we see, *1Co 8:7 But knowledge is not in all: but some, with conscience of the idol, until now eat as of a thing sacrificed to idols; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.* Some people lacking knowledge have a weak conscience, a conscience without the strength of convictions you have, the strong conscience. They have not been persuaded one way or another over the issue of idol sacrifice. They are Christians, yes, but they were still in awe of the idol, and they thought that the idol was something or had some power that defiled meats offered to it. That is what their conscience told them not to eat, and that made the idol sacrifice, the thing offered to the idol,

unlawful for them to eat. However, because those around them influenced them to eat the meat because they saw it as food, ordinary food, by doing this caused a crisis of conscience, and being without a strong conscience, they were soiled.

We must be careful of what we do in the presence of the younger people in the faith. By this I do not mean children or youths, but people who have come to Christ recently, or Christians who have had poor teaching and have not grasped the basics of the faith, *1Co 3:1 My friends, you are acting like the people of this world. That's why I could not speak to you as spiritual people. You are like babies as far as your faith in Christ is concerned. 1Co 3:2 So I had to treat you like babies and feed you milk. You could not take solid food, and you still cannot, 1Co 3:3 because you are not yet spiritual. You are jealous and argue with each other. This proves that you are not spiritual and that you are acting like the people of this world.* CEV.

Here is a principal of Christian living and one which is overlooked. We may all be Christians, but we are not all Christians at the same level of growth. You do not treat your child as having the same level of maturity as you do. Physically and mentally, there is a long way to go before they become mature, and they all have different rates of maturity. So you will behave differently to them because they may not have grasped the same level of understanding as you do.

One evening when I was about 5 years old, I remember going into the kitchen and asking my mother if tea was ready. No, not yet. Can I have a drink? No, wait until everyone is ready. Can I carry the tea pot into the dining room? Alright, be careful. And with that, I walked out of the kitchen carrying the tea pot, and being stupid, I put the spout in my mouth for a drink. I was too young to know any curse words, but I felt the searing pain as well as any adult. I dropped the tea pot which smashed and screamed. Well that put an end of me eating for about 3 days as my mouth was one huge blister. The Doctor came, sedated me, and everyone was so kind to the little idiot child that I was. And you will be pleased to know that I didn’t do it again.

The lesson is obvious, don’t trust a boy to do a man’s job. Don’t think that because a Christian can say Christian, that they are mature, because they may be extremely flaky and immature. This applies to people who dress up in the garb of ministry, those who have been to college, those who get elected into positions of responsibility, like the disgraced reverend Paula Vennells, former businesswoman and CEO of the Post Office. This comment appeared in a newspaper,

> The establishment looks after its own even when they leave under a cloud. Shortly after her departure she took up a post as the chair of Imperial College healthcare NHS trust, which runs several London hospitals; was appointed as a non-executive director at the Cabinet

> Office; joined the board of the furniture firm Dunelm, and retained a seat in the boardroom at the supermarket chain Morrisons. She has since quit all those roles, leaving Morrisons and Dunelm in 2021 just days after the court of appeal quashed the finding of post masters who had been charged, saying the Post Office knew there were faults in Horizon. Then just to add insult to injury the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby wanted to make her Bishop of London. She ticked all of the secular boxes and not one of the Christian boxes, leading to one observer saying, “Who was her god?”

We shall continue with this subject.

35..... The Problem of Idolatrous Practice.

Preparatory reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 8 verses 1 to 13 and Chapter 8 verses 23 to 33.

We continue our study on the subject of things offered to idols and the conscience which fails to act in a godly manner. We suggested that the conscience of such a person lacked knowledge, and we pointed out that anyone calling themselves a Christian should strive after godly knowledge, not the knowledge of this world. We made a distinction between true believers who tried to get the knowledge of God and those others, who say they are “Christians” but are really off with the fairies, and believe differently to Christ.

What are we to think of men like Justin Welby, who apart from assuming a non-biblical identity, as the archbishop of Canterbury, holds that homosexuals are part of God’s church, despite it being said by the Almighty that they shall not enter the Kingdom? Who is right, The Lord or Welby? Even some in his own community condemn him,

> By caving into the culture and the shrill cry of allegedly aggrieved Anglican pansexualists, Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, has lost the Anglican Communion and the respect of a significant number of its archbishops, bishops, and the respect of millions of ordinary Anglicans. His acquiescence to the sexual zeitgeist means he can no longer claim to be the titular head of a body of Christians, the third largest in the world. The majority of Anglican Christians believe Welby has adopted an unbiblical worldview on human sexuality, undoing and undermining more than 2000 years of church teaching and scriptural prohibition with a behavior that neither God nor the Church has ever endorsed.

> While he has disingenuously said he would not participate in blessing same sex marriages because he wanted to be a symbol of unity, his carefully calibrated response was met with global ridicule and icicle disbelief. We all know where his heart really lies. 'Who do you think you're fooling', but said far more elegantly by a polite theologically trained elite, the message was nonetheless clear. 'You have crossed the river of theological orthodoxy, and now find yourself floundering in the swamp of sexual heresy, from which there is no escape except by a full-throated repentance that must ring true for 75 million Anglicans.' It is unlikely ever to be heard. Archbishop Welby has gone over the cliff, Gadarene style, and taken 30 percent of the Anglican Communion who agree with him.

But it shows how wrong even this protesting faction of the Anglican Church is, for not even questioning the other issues around their structure of organisation. Their conscience as to what is right has been burned out, completely cauterised.

These Corinthians are wrestling with these issues and Paul is putting the way of God forward. Paul would not even break bread with the people Welby compromises with, *1Co 5:11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat*. Yet he says to the Corinthians, on the subject of idol sacrifices, *1Co 8:8 But food doesn't bring us any closer to God. We are no worse off if we don't eat, and we are no better off if we do. 1Co 8:9 Don't cause problems for someone with a weak conscience, just because you have the right to eat anything*. CEV. It is another profound statement by the Apostle, because it is not the eating of meat or the abstinence of meat that gains anything with God. Sin isn’t in the meat, like the demon drink, sin isn’t in the drink, because these things do not have life. This sort of morality has grown up seeing sins in objects that surround us, lifeless objects, instead of within us.

There is a difference between idolatry and the things offered to idols. Idolatry, idol worship, comes from the heart of a man that is not worshipping God. Eating the things which have been offered to idols does not mean that you are an idolater because you may have got the offering after it was offered and you just thought it was a piece of meat. You had nothing to do with the worship of idols. They used to sell off the meat after it was offered in sacrifice in the markets.

If then, sin is not in the meat, what is happening that will bring us nearer to God? It is the Jesus like attitude in looking at how your actions will affect another Christian, *1Co 8:10 You know all this, and so it doesn't bother you to eat in the temple of an idol. But suppose a person with a weak conscience sees you and decides to eat food that has been offered to idols*. Having a “good conscience” with regard to the things offered to idols, doesn’t mean you have a perfect

understanding of the law of offerings or that you have resolved the issue of eating meat or that this rule of faith is complied with in the abstinence from eating. It is not, *Rom 14:1 Welcome all the Lord's followers, even those whose faith is weak. Don't criticize them for having beliefs that are different from yours. Rom 14:2 Some think it is all right to eat anything, while those whose faith is weak will eat only vegetables. Rom 14:3 But you should not criticize others for eating or for not eating. After all, God welcomes everyone*. CEV.

With his spectacles on, the Christian is looking outward, at the fellow Christian, and if he has a good conscience, he will not offend the weaker brother. He is not looking at the legal side of this doctrine but the spiritual side of it, *1Co 8:11 Then what you know has destroyed someone Christ died for. 1Co 8:12 When you sin by hurting a follower with a weak conscience, you sin against Christ. 1Co 8:13 So if I hurt one of the Lord's followers by what I eat, I will never eat meat as long as I live*. CEV. We Christians must be careful that the strengths we have do not bulldoze down the new shoots of Christian growth, but carefully nourish them and encourage them in the ways of Jesus.

Which takes us to the 10th chapter of 1 Corinthians, which puts the other side of the story. The opening verses of this section are a recapitulation of the 8th chapter, *1Co 10:23 All things are lawful, but all are not profitable; all things are lawful, but all do not edify. 1Co 10:24 Let no one seek his own advantage, but that of the other*. Two points here are that the things which are allowed to a Christian are not necessarily profitable or edifying. We should if we are good Christians look to edify, build up the young in the faith and not unnecessarily go into contentious subjects.

Here Paul looks at the strong Christian who goes into a market and buys some meat, *1Co 10:25 Everything sold in the shambles eat, making no inquiry for conscience sake. 1Co 10:26 For the earth is the Lord's and its fullness*. The word “shambles” is a word for a meat market. The term 'Shambles' comes from medieval times and refers to a meat market, or an open-air slaughterhouse where butchers would kill and prepare animal meat to be sold. Many towns and cities in England have Shambles of their own, including York, Swansea, Manchester, and Worcester, *1Co 10:25 However, when you buy meat in the market, go ahead and eat it. Keep your conscience clear by not asking where the meat came from*.

Benson’s Commentary is apposite,

> The apostle now applies this principle to the point in question; and on the ground of it, gives the following rules concerning meats. *Whatsoever is sold in the shambles*. Though it were offered to idols before, yet being now set openly to sale, the idol is no more honoured therewith, and it is common meat; *that* you may buy,

and *eat* it in private, either in a friend's house or your own, *asking no question* — Whether it has been offered in sacrifice to an idol or not; *for conscience' sake.* With a view to satisfy your conscience respecting the lawfulness of eating it.

Or the expression, *for conscience' sake,* may mean, lest any needless scruple should arise, either in your own or your brother's conscience, so that you could not eat of it freely, without doubting in yourself, or giving offence to your brother. "*For the earth is the Lord's",* as the psalmist has expressed it, Psalm 24:1, and the fulness thereof. All creatures therein, which were made for man's use, and are given us freely to enjoy in Christ, (1 Timothy 4:4; 1 Timothy 6:17). And no demon hath any power or dominion over them. "By this argument the apostle showed the Corinthians that their knowledge and faith, as Christians, ought to prevent them from asking any questions concerning their food, which might lead the heathen to think that they acknowledged the power of their deities, either to give or to withhold any part of the fullness of the earth from the worshippers of the true God."

He is saying this, that you do not have to question eating the meat that has been offered to idols, it's not an offering any more, it is just a piece of meat like any other piece of meat, and you do not have to trouble yourself over it because you eat it before the God of the universe, just as you do any other food, giving thanks to God.

But there is a caveat, *1Co 10:27 If some unbelieving heathen invites you to his house, and you wish to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question for conscience' sake. 1Co 10:28 But if someone says to you, "This meat has been offered as a heathen sacrifice," make it your rule not to eat it, for the sake of the man who warned you and for conscience' sake; 1Co 10:29 I mean his conscience, not yours. Why then should my personal freedom be limited by another's conscience?* Williams. If an unbeliever invites you for a meal, and yes, you can go and eat with an unbeliever, you should eat what they provide without questioning where it came from, after all, it is the Lords provision. If somebody present says to you, "did you know the food was offered to idols?", then don't eat it.

You don't eat it, not because you are squeamish or have a weak conscience, it's obvious that you don't, because you would of course eat it otherwise, but you are sensitive to the situation. You do not want ill spoken of Jesus, or that you were seen in the company of unbelievers eating things sacrificed, and when they told you about this, you do not want it said that you just ignored it. No, you do not want to give offence to anyone, *1Co 10:30 If I give thanks and thus partake of food, why am I to be blamed for that for which I give thanks? 1Co 10:31 So if*

you eat or drink or do anything else, do everything to honor God. 1Co 10:32 Stop being stumbling blocks to Jews or Greeks or to the church of God, 1Co 10:33 just as I myself am in the habit of pleasing everybody in everything, not aiming at my own welfare but at that of as many people as possible, in order that they may be saved. Williams.

There is just something else I would like to say on this subject, *1Co 10:30 If I give thanks and thus partake of food, why am I to be blamed for that for which I give thanks?* It's a good point, absolutely, you have done nothing wrong, so do not spoil it by getting on your high horse and insisting that you will eat and hard luck to the weak if you cannot find the same courage to eat. That is not the sort of behaviour you should adopt as a mature Christian. You should yield to the weak conscience or to the mischievous conscience, and not cause any offence.

That said you are also bound to correct the brother for his weak views not to capitulate to his weakness. If you did that, there would be no growth in the Churches and they would rapidly descend to the lowest common denominator. No, you correct him in love, longsuffering, kindness, patience, gentleness, goodness in order that you may win him and strengthen him, help him build a good conscience to regulate him through the trials of life.

I want to revisit Acts Chapter 15, to see what we make of it now and whether we see it as an absolute prohibition on "things sacrificed to idols", *Act 15:19 Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: Act 15:20 But that we write unto them, that they* ***abstain from pollutions of idols****, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. Act 15:21 For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day*.

On the subject of idols, it says that the gentiles should "*abstain from pollutions of idols*". What does this mean? It doesn't mean you cannot eat meat which has passed from the temple of idols to the market for sale. I am surprised at the number of translations that make the verse say, "tell them not to eat anything that has been offered to idols", because that contradicts what Paul says. Acts Chapter 15 is talking about being polluted by the practice of idolatry, not about the after effects of the things that were offered and have served their purpose.

In Corinthians, he is not talking about idolatry per se, or even about the food offered to idols, since eating or not eating doesn't recommend us to God either. Paul is looking at the offences we cause by approaching an issue insensitively, and how we can offend a weak conscience by a strong conscience. As we said, the person who has a weak conscience should be respected but they are by no means the example of faith, and they should be corrected.

36..... The Problem of the Roles of Men.

Preparatory reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 11 verses 1 - 17

An alternative title to this ministry would be “head coverings”, or “hair coverings”. It is one of the more contentious issues because it involves doing something which can be seen by other people, by which I mean, the wearing of a hair covering. The hair covering can become very legalistic and prescriptive, Legalistic in the sense that those who do it think that every woman should do it, and that the woman who doesn’t do it is being deliberately sinful. Prescriptive in making certain types of coverings good and other coverings bad. Do the women understand why they cover their heads? Do the men know their role in all of this?

It seems that the Corinthians, and certainly many Christians today do not know their roles as men and women under the Lord Jesus. They follow the secular norms of the age and listen more intently to what the world says and does than what God says. We condemn the filthy behaviour of the Muslim perverts in Rotherham, who were sexual predators on young girls, while condoning the role reversal in the churches, which puts women over men, because the men lack the will and knowledge to lead the churches of God. We were all mired in this confusion at one time, so we had better not think that these people are worse than us, they are not.

We live in a confused world of gender, where men become feminised and women become masculine. Their created roles are lost in the mist of time, and we have substituted roles which clearly are disruptive of a sound society and clearly the work of the devil. Who else would cause men to think that they are women? The devil has achieved in this generation, a victory over the church, by getting them to confuse their roles, *Deu 22:5 Women must not pretend to be men, and men must not pretend to be women. The LORD your God is disgusted with people who do that*. CEV.

Are men and women equal? It is a good job that the Creator made man and woman on different occasions, for had He made them at the same time, we would never have heard the end of the debate as to who was in charge, who was the greater. He made them in their order and the order stands from Creation. There is a limited equality for we are all one in Jesus. There is no different between the salvation for a man or a woman, for we all partake in the same benefits of redemption.

But they are fundamentally different and we were created with different roles. Biologically, this difference is marked by childbearing, a thing man cannot do, so we are not equal. Intellectually we are equal, physically we are not, which can be seen in the outcry by trans-athletes who are outperforming women. Spiritually

we have some equalities and also differences, for example, all of Christ apostles were men. We are different, but that difference is complementary and not a barrier to working together. We are not equal but we cannot do without the other. I think that when God made woman from Adam, part of what Adam was as a person was removed, and he could only function as a whole person by having Eve back in his life. He needs a counterpart.

The church has also come under a new order. Take for instance this anecdote from a well known evangelical, who applauds this man for giving to the wife “a taste of how much God loves her”,

> A little while ago I talked to a man in South Africa who told me that his wife had made his life almost impossible for a number of years. She humiliated him in front of friends, telephoned his boss and told lies about him, ran up debts that he was expected to pay, and ill-treated him in a whole host of other ways. “How are you handling all this?” I enquired of him. His reply moved me deeply: “My only wish is that I might be able through a Christ-like attitude to give her a taste of how much God loves her, and, above all else, my longing is to be there for her until she leaves this world for eternity. I thought as I listened, “Why, you could almost put those same words on the lips of the Holy Spirit”.

I find that it is so wrong on many levels, and as for saying, “Why, you could almost put those same words on the lips of the Holy Spirit”, is bordering on blasphemy. I would question whether the woman is a Christian, because her whole attitude has not the slightest bit of Jesus in it, or it would seem, even the desire for Jesus to be in it. The man is a wimp. He does not confront her wickedness, and is prepared to be a doormat, instead leaving the issues to be sorted out by heaven, rather than doing something about it himself. He has a parasitic attitude and that bodes ill for the church he attends, for what could he preach on discipline? You just let the people get away with things and don’t bother to confront them. Why, then the apostle would have not written to the Corinthians. That man needs to sort out the leadership problem that he is at present afraid to address, and his wife ought to learn what it is to be a woman and stop being a gossip and a bully.

Like the Corinthians, like all young Christians, they must be taught their roles if we are to have any sanity in the churches, *1Co 11:2 Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you. 1Co 11:3 But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God*. There it is in Christianity, the Divine order, starting with the Headship of Father. The lower orders, “men and women” pay lip service to this headship by acquiescing that God is the Head, but disobey the rest of the order, by ignoring

the role of men and women. Put it this way, in descending order, “If God is Head over all, then the Messiah is under God but the head of the man, and the man is under the Messiah but the head of the woman”.

That is what the Scripture says is the Divine order, and if you do not like this saying, you are not one of God’s people but a rebel. Any violation of the Divine order is a violation of God Himself, for we are saying NO to God, *Luk 19:13 And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. Luk 19:14 But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying,* ***We will not have this man to reign over us***. Yet the church continues its pretence, as if everything is alright while ignoring and disobeying Jesus’ fundamental order.

Paul takes it a step further, *1Co 11:4 Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head*. This act shows that a man is in subjection, and playing his role of obedience, but why would a man take the trouble to uncover his head? By his head the Scripture does not mean “the head, or leader of the man”, it literally means your cranium. So it is a shame for a man to have a cap or a covering upon his head. This may have been a custom among the heathens or just that they always covered their heads as part of their dress in antiquity. They did not know that it was wrong, and for whatever reason, the men kept a covering over their head. But Paul approaches this from a spiritual point of view not from a fashion point of view, it is a religious distinctive.

I imagine that you have seen pictures of Jewish men wearing a kippah, or skull cap, and portrayals of Jesus with a prayer shawl, which he pulls over his head when he teaches or prays. This portrayal of both groups at the time of Jesus is absolutely wrong. For a Jewish man to cover his head when he prays or prophesies is to do a pagan (Gentile) act contrary to God's way. It was the way of Gentiles to cover their heads. Such behaviour failed to appreciate or follow the Torah in its pure meaning and intention. The only covering Jesus wore was a Crown of Thorns at His Crucifixion. In fact, this is the only occasion that we historically know that Jesus wore something on His head.

The custom of wearing a kippah arose in Babylonia between the third and fifth centuries A.D. The custom of covering one’s head is based on custom, a minhag, that first appeared during the Rabbinic Period (roughly, from the beginning of the Common Era to 500 A.D.). While there are no references to this in the Torah and no explicit statements in Jewish legal sources about covering the head, among some Jews this custom has taken on the force of religious law. Clothing worn by Jews usually varies according to which denomination of Judaism they adhere to. Orthodox Jewish men always cover their heads by wearing a skullcap known in Hebrew as a kippah or in Yiddish as a yarmulke. Liberal or Reform Jews see the covering of the head as optional, it is no longer unusual to see Reform Jews covering their heads when praying.

So much for the traditional beliefs of Christianity, in the Old Testament they didn't wear head coverings and in the New Testament they do not wear head coverings. In case you are going to cite Moses, *Exo 34:29 Moses came down from Mount Sinai, carrying the Ten Commandments.* ***His face was shining brightly*** *because the LORD had been speaking to him. But Moses did not know at first that his face was shining. Exo 34:30 When Aaron and the others looked at Moses, they saw that his face was shining, and they were afraid to go near him. Exo 34:31 Moses called out for Aaron and the leaders to come to him, and he spoke with them. Exo 34:32 Then the rest of the people of Israel gathered around Moses, and he gave them the laws that the LORD had given him on Mount Sinai. Exo 34:33* ***The face of Moses kept shining****, and after he had spoken with the people,* ***he covered his face with a veil****. Exo 34:34* ***Moses would always remove the veil when he went into the sacred tent to speak with the LORD****. And when he came out, he would tell the people everything the LORD had told him to say. Exo 34:35 They could see that his face was still shining. So after he had spoken with them, he would put the veil back on and leave it on until the next time he went to speak with the LORD.* CEV.

Moses does not wear a head covering but a **face covering**, to cover up the glory he had in the presence of God from the people who were afraid to go near him. The second thing that he does is to remove the covering in the presence of the Lord, *Exo 34:34* ***Moses would always remove the veil when he went into the sacred tent to speak with the LORD****.* This confirms the pattern for the Corinthian men and their practice would have been consistent over the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Paul continues, *1Co 11:7 For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man*. As man is the image the εἰκών = icon and the δόξα = glory of God he holds a unique position in the order of things. As the **icon** he is the representation of God and all that God is he is, the man must take his position with seriousness. As the **glory** of God, he is like Solomon among the people, full of majesty, dignity, honour and praise, *Mat 6:28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: Mat 6:29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these*. He doesn't hide the fact that he is what God has made him, he is proud of it and he glories in his position. This is something to live up to.

With this high accolade resting on his shoulders, the man ought to exalt in his position, "*For a man indeed ought* ***not to cover his head****, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God*". He does not cover his head and he will not cover his head. He will not give his glory to another and he will not let a woman steal it. He is not the weedy doormat of a person that we saw at the start of this ministry.

He strives after those godly characteristics of his Father in heaven, *Heb 12:28 Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: Heb 12:29 For our God is a consuming fire.* He is a warrior for the truth of God and will not compromise.

You hear a phrase bandied about today, that, “a man is in touch with his feminine side”. No he is not. That is just a sop thrown out at dominant women by ineffectual men. He must be in touch with his masculinity and women ought to be on guard against any man stealing their characteristics. Don’t confuse male weakness with masculinity, and call it “the feminine side” of his life.

I have found few men who fear God. I have seen a lot of men, professedly in the faith and outside of the faith, who fear men and men’s opinion of them. They put the fear of man above the fear of God but, *Luk 12:4 My friends, don't be afraid of people. They can kill you, but after that, there is nothing else they can do. Luk 12:5 God is the one you must fear. Not only can he take your life, but he can throw you into hell. God is certainly the one you should fear!* CEV. The Christian man is God fearing, fearing Him for His omnipotence, fearing Him so as not to offend Him, fearing Him because He is to be respected. In all things he sees God as being first in his life, after all he was made for the service of God, and the woman must realise this.

Paul concludes the man’s position by saying, *1Co 11:8 For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man*. That is “the man is not out of (ἐκ) the woman” that is he is not created out of the woman, but “the woman is out of (ἐκ) the man” that is she was created from out of the man, *Gen 2:21 And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; Gen 2:22 And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man*. Paul invokes the creation as support for his argument.

The position of a man is special in Creation. He is above a woman, he is in the image of his Father, he holds the Divine order in place on earth. Whatever service the church thinks it can render God, it is all made empty be not living up to the positions created by God. If it does not accept the roles given, it is a denial of the Creation, and a denial of the headship of man and a denial of Jesus.

37..... The Problem of the Roles of Women

Preparatory reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 11 verses 1 – 17

We have established the man's place in the order of creation, and now turn to the woman's place in creation and how she shows it. The man showed his position by not wearing a head covering, a hat when praying of prophesying, the woman does the opposite, she wears a head covering so as not to dishonor herself, *1Co 11:5 But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head*:

Before we go in to more detail about the woman, I would like to make an observation, which is sometimes overlooked, that the man and the woman function together, as a team, as two members of Jesus army, not as separate persons. The man shows his authority in the church by not having a head covering and the woman wears one, and this shows who is who in the relationship. But they both are partners in the Gospel, like Priscilla and Aquila, *Act 18:24 And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. Act 18:25 This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. Act 18:26 And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, **they took him unto them**, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly*. "They" both, as a team, expounded the way of God. This is a synergistic relationship.

Husbands do not take this scripture of headship very seriously and leave the wife to make up her own mind whether to do it, as if it has nothing to do with them at all. The woman can do what she wants, it up to her, and she will find God's hand upon her if she is wrong in her behaviour. What nonsense, of course it has something to do with him. As "the head of the woman *is* the man", he is responsible that she behaves appropriately before Christ. He cannot, on a whim, neglect the welfare of the woman, as if they function separately, and leave her to go her own way. He must take responsibility for her or he shows what is evident in the churches today that men are the weaker sex and a role reversal has taken place.

Paul states the case for women, *1Co 11:5 But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. 1Co 11:6 For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered*. This is strong language, if the woman refuses to cover her head, or hair, then she ought to have it shaved off of her. The pictures of German collaborators came to mind as I thought of this. Terrible retribution on the poor woman for her waywardness.

The punishment of shaving a woman's head had biblical origins. In Europe, the practice dated back to the dark ages, with the Visigoths. During the middle ages, this mark of shame, denuding a woman of what was supposed to be her most seductive feature, was commonly a punishment for adultery. Shaving women's heads as a mark of retribution and humiliation was reintroduced in the 20th century. After French troops occupied the Rhineland in 1923, German women who had relations with them later suffered the same fate. And during the Second World War, the Nazi state issued orders that German women accused of sleeping with non-Aryans or foreign prisoners employed on farms should also be publicly punished in this way. It is not just something which was put forward at Corinth, although I doubt whether it was carried out by the churches, as Paul does not urge the church to conduct corporal punishment. It is hypothetical, but none the less terrifying, and also, no such punishment is put on a man for disobedience, but his is equally condemned.

However, the reason for wearing a covering lies in the Creation. It is not some arbitrary custom, some Corinthian ideal, something they used to do in olden times but which we sophisticated and intellectual people can neglect, because they were primitive, poor souls. It comes from the very soil under your feet, *1Co 11:8 For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man*, as we said, "the man is not out of (ἐκ) the woman" that is he is not created out of the woman, but "the woman is out of (ἐκ) the man" that is she was created from out of the man. If you deny God's order and you deny God's creation, then you have only man's order and man's world, and you are eternally dead.

The apostle leads us on to some other conclusions, *1Co 11:8 For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. 1Co 11:9 Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man.* They are a partnership**, but not of equals in everything**. The "Got Questions" website says, "Nowhere does Scripture imply that women are unequal to men". Really! It says to the contrary, "*Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man".* Two views of this situation are put forward, egalitarianism and complementarianism.

The "egalitarian" or "equalitarian" position states,

> Unlike liberal theology, egalitarianism or equalitarianism, claims to uphold the authority of Scripture while also embracing a feminist understanding of equality between men and women. Not only do men and women share equally in the divine image, but they also share equally in leadership roles in the church, the home, and beyond: the Bible does not assign leadership in any sphere of life based on gender.

This view is wrong and the more Biblical view is,

> The term “complementarianism” was coined in 1988 which says that while men and women are created equally in the image of God and have equal value and dignity, they nevertheless have different, **complementary** callings both in marriage and in the church. In marriage, God calls the husband to be the “head” of his wife (1Cor 11:3; Eph 5:23), which requires him to provide self-sacrificial leadership, protection, and provision for his wife and family (Eph. 5:21–33). In the church, although redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation, some governing and teaching roles are restricted to men. The different callings of men and women in the home and in the church are grounded in God’s good creation design and are not a consequence of sin or the Fall.

Men and women are **not equal** as to the role in creation, just as the man is not equal to Christ in redemption, and he is there to serve Him, *Luk 17:7 But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? Luk 17:8 And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Luk 17:9 Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. Luk 17:10 So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say,* ***We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do***.

The woman is to serve man, and man is to love the woman, *Eph 5:22 Women, submit yourselves unto your own men, as unto Jehovah, Eph 5:23 For the man is the head of the woman, even as Messiah is the head of the ekklesia: and he is the Saviour of the body. Eph 5:24 Therefore as the ekklesia is subject unto Messiah, so let the women be to their own men in everything. Eph 5:25 Men, love your women, even as Messiah also loved the ekklesia, and gave himself for it; Eph 5:26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, Eph 5:27 That he might present it to himself a glorious ekklesia, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. Eph 5:28 So ought men to love their women as their own bodies. He that loves his woman loves himself.*

The man is to lead the woman and give to the woman, everything that is within his power, to sanctify and cleanse her. He must even sacrifice his life to that end, self-sacrifice, and she is to receive all the good at his hands. He is to endow her with the godly strength of character, not to seek her own welfare but the welfare of her man, and in this attitude they two become one. Recognising this is one of the hard things to do, because it means giving up self, and practically, *1Co 11:10 For this reason a woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head, because of the angels. 1Co 11:11 In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. 1Co 11:12 For just as*

woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God. 1Co 11:13 Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?

She lays aside her position for man's sake and the angels, *1Co 11:10 And so, because of this, and also because of the angels, a woman ought to wear something on her head, as a sign of her authority*. I will include the passage that I wrote on this subject, **The Centurion's authority**, (From Luke's Gospel, 170. The first challenge Luke 20: 1 – 8)

> The authority that the Roman was under was a series of rules binding the Legions together in a structured manner. It was not unlike God's authority, working among men to keep order, *Rom 13:1 Let every soul to the higher authorities be subject,* ***for there is no authority except from God,*** *and the authorities existing are appointed by God.* The same is true of the authority in the family, it is a hierarchy, a rank of persons, and its order goes back to Creation.
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> If you take the Centurion's position, it is exactly the same as the woman's position in 1Cor 11: 2 – 16. He is under authority and she is under authority, *1Co 11:10 Therefore ought the woman to have authority on her head, on account of the angels.* Darby. Both the Centurion and the Christian woman are under authority. She has "authority on her head" and he has authority on his head, because he is under authority. She shows her authority by wearing a hair covering, and he shows he is under authority by wearing the insignia of a Roman Centurion, the helmet and plume, which made him recognisable in battle.
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> Some women see hair covering as a symbol of her servitude, but to the contrary it is a badge of her authority and position. The Centurion never thought of his helmet and insignia as an imposition, as a sign of his inferior position, but a mark of the respect of rank. He was to set it forth to show his position and rank to the troops. The woman too has a mark of the honour of God to show the angels her rank.
>
> The woman carries the insignia of her rank before the legions of angels. God has shown a difference between men and woman to those creatures, the angels, and the woman, whose privilege was to bear the Messiah and to bear mankind, is given a covering for her head. If the woman does not want this upon her head, the angels will be taught a lesson that she is not willing to serve in her appointed position. The

man who accepts this is likewise not accepting his position, and you can see by this irresponsible action, how Christ is not honoured in the Church.

Now we will come to the difficult part of this study, the last verse, which according to the Authorised Version, takes all the things that Paul has said and nullifies it by apparently saying to any who are being contentious, that we do not have a custom, “like head coverings” any way. *1Co 11:14 Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? 1Co 11:15 But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering. 1Co 11:16 But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God*. That is a shallow understanding of it, to dismiss all that has been said as “*we have no such custom, neither the churches of God”.*

There is a teaching in the natural realm, that if a woman has long hair it is a glory to her, and if man has long hair, it is effeminate and a shame to him. This shows us, through God’s window upon nature that we can see, if we have the eyes to see, lessons all around us. Lessons about ourselves, in the wisdom God has revealed in nature, a second book of revelation, not written on paper, but written in life itself. The nature of man and woman was written so that we could better function.

How do you see all of this? Firstly I suppose, by meditating, thinking long about it, *Psa 1:2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. Psa 1:3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. Psa 1:4 The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away*. In this way, Solomon saw the wonders of God, *1Ki 4:32 And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five. 1Ki 4:33 And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes. 1Ki 4:34 And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom*.

To give two specific examples of nature mirroring life, *Pro 6:6 You lazy people can learn by watching an anthill. Pro 6:7 Ants don't have leaders, Pro 6:8 but they store up food during harvest season.* CEV……and, *Pro 30:24 On this earth four things are small but very wise: Pro 30:25 Ants, who seem to be feeble, but store up food all summer long; Pro 30:26 badgers, who seem to be weak, but live among the rocks; Pro 30:27 locusts, who have no king, but march like an army; Pro 30:28 lizards, which can be caught in your hand, but sneak into palaces*. CEV.

There are in all of Creation object lessons in how to live if only we will look into it, in nature, the natural world, but it is not these which govern us. They may add to our beliefs but are not the authority of scripture that we rely upon to settle disputes. If nature teaches that long hair is given to the woman as a covering, *"if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering"*, that does not in the eyes of the church, count for authority.

Paul has given an analogy of the hair coverings in nature, but, *1Co 11:16 But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God*. That is, if anyone is contentious over the issue of hair coverings **in nature**, we don't have this as a custom, and neither do the churches. Paul has already given us the Biblical reason for obedience to this command, *1Co 11:12 For just as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God. 1Co 11:13 Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?* That covers all women in all times, from the Creation until the end of the world.

38.... The Problem of Abuse at the Lord's Table. Part 1

Preparatory reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 11 verses 20 – 34.

In the young Corinthian church there were "schisms" and "heresies", *1Co 11:17 Now this I ordain: not praising you, that you come together, not for the better, but for the worse. 1Co 11:18 For first of all I hear that when you come together in the church, there are schisms (σχίσμα) among you. And in part I believe it. 1Co 11:19 For there must be also heresies (αιρεσις): that they also, who are approved may be made manifest among you.* DRB.

There were schisms, (σχίσμα) or divisions, because they had not agreed upon certain issues and were still arguing over them. There were heresies, or factions, teachings which men had aligned themselves with, like the heresy of the Sadducees, *Act 5:17 Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is **the sect (αἵρεσις) of the Sadducees**,) and were filled with indignation*, or *Act 15:5 But there rose up certain of **the sect (αἱρεσις) of the Pharisees** which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses*.

Paul had occasion to rebuke this earlier in the epistle because men were aligning themselves with men and not Christ, *1Co 3:3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? 1Co 3:4 For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? 1Co 3:5 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? 1Co 3:6 I have planted,*

Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. It was carnality, base human fleshly leanings which made men like this, not spiritual mindedness.

I want to just take a moment to look at the word "heresy" because it is a word which changes within the very pages of scripture, and becomes the word used for every person who goes against orthodoxy, *Tit 3:9 But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain. Tit 3:10 A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; Tit 3:11 Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself*. Here are some attempts to define the word heresy,

> A heresy is any belief or practice that explicitly undermines the gospel. The identification and condemnation of heresies have played a significant role in shaping the development of Christian theology.
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> Unlike regular "false teachings" which Christians can survive even if they believe those mistakes, heresies are false teachings which prove someone is not a Christian at all. So these aren't just mistakes, they're fatal mistakes
>
> A theological doctrine or system rejected as false by ecclesiastical authority. The Greek word hearesis (from which heresy is derived) was originally a neutral term that signified merely the holding of a particular set of philosophical opinions.

Christianity was considered a heresy in its early days, *Act 24:14 But this I confess unto thee, that after **the way which they call heresy**, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets,.....Act 28:22 But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning **this sect**, we know that every where it is spoken against. Act 28:23 And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening*.

"The word heresy comes from haeresis, a Latin transliteration of the Greek word αἵρεσις originally meaning choosing, choice, course of action, or in an extended sense a sect or school of thought, which by the end of the first century came to denote warring factions and the party spirit. The word appears in the New Testament, usually translated as sect and was appropriated by the Church to mean a sect or division that threatened the unity of Christians. Heresy eventually became regarded as a departure from orthodoxy, a sense in which heterodoxy was already in Christian use soon after the year 100 A.D.

Heresy is used today to denote the formal denial or doubt of a core doctrine of the Christian faith as defined by one or more of the Christian churches. It is distinguished from both apostasy and schism, apostasy being nearly always total abandonment of the Christian faith after it has been freely accepted, and schism being a formal and deliberate breach of Christian unity and an offense against charity without being based essentially on doctrine".

From a word which meant "choice" it quickly came to mean "unorthodox", or heterodox, with regard to belief, *2Pe 2:1 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. 2Pe 2:2 And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of*.

The word occurs 3 times in the Old Testament LXX, version of the bible.

1. *Gen 49:5 Simeon and Levi are brethren; they completed injustice by their sects* ***(aἵρεσις)****.*
2. *Lev 22:18 Speak unto Aaron, and to his sons, and unto all the congregation of the sons of Israel, and say unto them, Whatsoever he be of the house of Israel, or of the foreigners in Israel, that will offer his oblation for all his vows, and for all his freewill offerings* ***(aἵρεσις)****, which they will offer unto the LORD for a burnt offering;*
3. *Lev 22:21 And whosoever offereth a sacrifice of peace offerings unto the LORD to accomplish his vow, or a freewill offering* ***(aἵρεσις)****, in beeves or sheep, it shall be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no blemish therein.*

The two verses regarding the offerings apply them to the "freewill offering", that is an offering of choice. Clearly a choice on the religion followed the same idea of choice in offerings, with nothing sinister in it. But the usage changed and for some reason, the church decided that the word heresy was exactly the word to use, to describe people who had different views to themselves. Unfortunately, with the growth of denominations away from a single church model of the New Testament, the religious landscape has been pock marked with "heresies", and we have lost the meaning of the word heretic. Nowadays a heretic means anyone who does not agree with you.

This heresy does however serve a purpose, *1Co 11:19 For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you*. For better or for worse, it will act as a process of sifting out the leaders in the assembly.

The purpose of meeting together as a church or assembly, the primary purpose, is to eat the Lord's Supper, *1Co 11:20 When ye come together therefore into one*

place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. It wasn't the sole purpose of coming together, but it was the most important reason for coming together.

The church or assembly had undergone a change at Pentecost. They were still a Jewish gathering, and it was some time before the Gentiles were brought in, nearly one decade afterwards, and then only at a trickle. Pentecost had been a shock to the Jewish system, the priesthood of men, Levites, was done away with, it was redundant, sacrifices had ceased to be presented, the offerings had stopped, the service of the Temple worship and the three great feast days of the year had come to an end, so what was there for this new sect, the Christians, to do? The Jewish religious worship had come to an abrupt end, and for a deeply religious people, this was disturbing. Those things that they had observed had become obsolete.

It might not seem to matter to us in the 21st century, but I am sure it mattered and deeply troubled those men back then. Their lives revolved around the festivals, "meat, drink, holydays, the new moons, the Sabbath days*"*, and now these joyous occasions were gone. What were they to do in their place? After years of being good Jews, observing the Torah, observing all of the Jewish rituals, this man Jesus had come along and disposed of it all. They were left with a gaping chasm in their Jewish souls but they still had the compunction to worship God, but how?

I do not think it was a great relief to them that these things had ceased, but rather a sorrow. The yearly ordered round of events gave a structure and meaning to their lives. The traditions of their families going back centuries were all tied together with this sense of pride in being the chosen race, God's people, and now at a stroke, the whole fabric of their lives was shaken to its foundation. It wasn't easy and a lot of readjusting had to be made. The assembly came together, *Act 2:42They spent their time learning from the apostles, and they were like family to each other. They also broke bread and prayed together. Act 2:43 Everyone was amazed by the many miracles and wonders that the apostles worked.* CEV. This was the first act of the new assembly.

They immediately went into discussion mode to find out what and how they were now to do their new religion. I can see why "miracles and wonders" were so necessary to this new Jewish assembly. The people needed an assurance that they had not been deceived and this gave them confidence in God being with them. As they adjusted to their new relationship, it would not be necessary to have the supernatural as they would have grown in confidence that this was the new Way.

The big meeting in Jerusalem, to discuss the relationship to the Law of Moses, came 18 years after the resurrection of Jesus, *Act 15:1 And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised*

after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. This issue had been bubbling away for 18 years, and now came to a head. All of this occurs about 4 years before Paul writes to the Corinthians. The upshot of this council is that, *Act 15:28 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; Act 15:29 That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well*. Moses was well and truly done with and the good man was finally buried!

So with the death of all that pertained to Moses, what form did the worship in the assembly take? That is where the most important subject to Christians came to the fore. I've no doubt the Jews, with their long historic relationship with Jehovah Jesus, were more attuned to the death of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus, than the pagan Corinthians, and this caused the abuse of what was the Christians new sacred ceremony.

Of course there were other meetings and the Lord does not put any limit on what how many you can have, perhaps the proviso being, *Rom 14:19 Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another*. Needs of different assemblies vary so that a "one size fits all" ministry is not realistic. The age of the church members, the health of the church members, their income and status, their knowledge base, their culture, the availability of good leaders, the growth rate of individuals in the Lord, the gifts of the spirit given to them, the degree of persecution they suffer, the times and places in which they live, and the sins that trouble them. These and much else besides, means that the individual churches will be tackling different problems and require different types of meetings to discuss the issues, but one thing unites them all. It is the coming together to participate in the Lord's Supper.

Perhaps the Corinthians, a mixed multitude of believing Jews and Gentiles, had really tried to honour this ordinance. The Jews most probably took the view that it was like the three festivals of the Jews all rolled into one, and an occasion of great rejoicing, but with some degree of sobriety, the Gentiles got in the mood taking their cue from the Jews, but without the same levels of restraint, not having the same cultural heritage, and soon things descended into a drunken party, *1Co 11:20 When you meet together, you don't really celebrate the Lord's Supper. 1Co 11:21 You even start eating before everyone gets to the meeting, and some of you go hungry, while others get drunk.* CEV.

What had started out as a good thing had by satan's devious methods become a disgrace and an occasion of sin among the people of God. It reminds me of a similar event in the time of Moses, *Exo 32:5 And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to the LORD. Exo 32:6 And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings;* ***and the people sat down to eat and***

to drink, and rose up to play. *Exo 32:7 And the LORD said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou* ***broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves****:* Other gods were breaking into the church.

39... The Problem of Abuse at the Lord's Table. Part 2

Preparatory reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 11 verses 20 – 34.

Within a very short time of the assembly at Corinth being founded, possibly within a year, cracks are beginning to show in the fabric of worship. The behaviour of the Corinthians is strictly not Christian, and Paul writes his epistle rebuking them. One of the issues is the behaviour around the Lord's Table. Apparently, they ate a meal before they took the Lord's Table, *1Co 11:20 When you meet together, you don't really celebrate the Lord's Supper. 1Co 11:21 You even start eating before everyone gets to the meeting, and some of you go hungry, while others get drunk. 1Co 11:22 Don't you have homes where you can eat and drink? Do you hate God's church? Do you want to embarrass people who don't have anything? What can I say to you? I certainly cannot praise you*. CEV.

This meal may have been conducted as a copy of the last supper, having a fellowship meal before the memorial of the Lord's death. Some have suggested it was a "love feast" from, *Jud 1:12 These are hidden reefs* ***at your love feasts****, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding themselves; waterless clouds, swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; Jud 1:13 wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever*. ESV. It is difficult to know what is meant here, and as the word is only use once, care should be taken when making a doctrine out of it, and we should be very careful about turning it into a church practice.

In very little time, the Corinthians had turned this memorial into a "booze up". Restraint and consideration for others had been lost, the purpose for gathering degenerated into a bun fight for those who had food to another group being frozen out and having nothing. All the truth of what they intended to do was being lost by this foolish behaviour. The way out of this was to start to develop some situational awareness about other people in the church, and not just think about your own welfare, to develop the true purpose of coming together and behave as Christians should do.

As for the eating and drinking, *1Co 11:22 What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not*. Paul isn't against them eating and drinking, he doesn't lecture them on gluttony or on

alcohol that is not the point at this stage. He tells them that it's better to eat at home, and not to despise, belittle, the church of God, and those poor people who have nothing. He is not saying that it is wrong to have a meal, but that it is wrong to have a meal and treat people unkindly, and the things of God irreverently. Besides, it is more important to concentrate on the Lord's Supper than your own supper.

He moves on from the "domestic" arrangements of the celebration, to the celebration itself, *1Co 11:23 For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: 1Co 11:24 And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. 1Co 11:25 After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. 1Co 11:26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he com*e.

It is word for word the same as Jesus said at the last supper and it is memorial of Jesus death, not death and resurrection. Why? We rejoice that Jesus has conquered death, and has set free all who were enslaved by a fear of death, *Heb 2:14 We are people of flesh and blood. That is why Jesus became one of us. He died to destroy the devil, who had power over death. Heb 2:15 But he also died to rescue all of us who live each day in fear of dying.* CEV. We can remember Jesus' death knowing that He has triumphed over sin and death!

The Israelites looked back to the Passover in Egypt as a defining moment in their history, when their identity as a nation began. That was when they escaped death and slavery through the intervention of God and they were freed to serve the Lord. In the same way, we look back to the events surrounding the crucifixion as the defining moment in our history, *1Co 5:7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even* ***Christ our Passover*** *is sacrificed for us*:. We have escaped Egypt, we have undergone the Exodus, *Luk 9:30 And, behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah. Luk 9:31 Appearing in glory, they spoke of His* ***exodus****, which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem*. LITV. But we have not entered the Promised Land yet, into heaven itself, we are receiving but not having received the kingdom, *Heb 12:28 Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fea*r.

We have not entered fully into the resurrection life with Jesus, into the reality of His presence and Kingdom, and so for now we remember His death, *Mat 26:28 For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. Mat 26:29 But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine,* ***until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's***

kingdom. In a manner, our looking back at Jesus' death, is our looking forward to our own death. The death of Jesus does us no good unless we are **IN HIM**, *Rom 6:3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Rom 6:4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life*.

Unless I see myself in Him, one with Him, not just looking at Him objectively, but feeling with Him as one, subjectively, I am just going through an empty ritual eating bread and drinking wine, *Rom 6:5 For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection*. This is getting near the meaning of, *Mat 16:24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. Mat 16:25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it**: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it***.

We can understand why Paul exclaims, *Php 3:10 That I may have knowledge of him, and of the power of his coming back from the dead, and a part with him in his pains, becoming like him in his death; Php 3:11 If in any way I may have the reward of life from the dead*. BBE. This is the road to our own death, the way of the cross, because we are not of this world.

This is a serious business, and a number of arguments are put forward in support. It is not just a memorial, a passive mourning of the lost, as when people gather around the Cenotaph and mourn for the dead, it is a remembrance, ἀνάμνησις = recollection, an active reminding of an event that is done, like a reminder or schedule in a calendar. It is not only to look backward but to look forwards, *1Co 11:26 For every time you eat this bread and drink from this cup, you proclaim (καταγγέλλω) the Lord's death until He comes again.* Williams. It is a proclamation, an announcement (καταγγέλλω) of the death of Jesus to the watching world, that we believe He is coming again for us. It is a celebration and not a “wake” or a funeral service.

Perhaps this was where the idea for a communal celebration came from, a meal, a recollection of “the last supper”. The sharing, the communion, is partaking in the “body and blood” of Jesus in the elements of the “bread and wine”. Many get in a contention as to whether the bread and wine turn into the real Christ, the real presence of Jesus in the taking of the Lord’s Table, whether some form of spiritual transformation or transmutation takes place and they become His actual body and blood.

Let me ask you this, is Jesus in you, the real Jesus, the real presence? Yes or No? As a Christian, I say a resounding yes, He does, *Col 1:27 God did this because he wanted you Gentiles to understand his wonderful and glorious mystery. And the mystery is **that Christ lives in you**, and he is your hope of sharing in God's*

glory. CEV. Well then, we should not be surprised that the "bread and wine" is the real presence of Christ, *Mat 26:26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said,* ***Take, eat; this is my body****. Mat 26:27 And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; Mat 26:28* ***For this is my blood*** *of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins*.

Jesus says it is "my body" and so it must be. Here also in 1st Corinthians, *1Co 11:27 Wherefore* ***whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup*** *of the Lord, unworthily, shall* ***be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord*****.** It does not say, whosoever eats the bread and drinks the wine unworthily, shall be guilty of the bread and wine, using another translation, *1Co 11:27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord*. The bread and wine have become the body and blood, to the communicant. The Lord's Table is a participation or *sharing* in Christ's body and blood.

May churches have different methods of guarding you against eating unworthily, by "fencing the table", restricting who can eat and drink. A certain flavour of Baptists, the Strict Baptist, or restricted Baptists, have rules that allow only members who are worthy, to be offered communion. Some Scottish churches used to issue people with "tokens" that showed that they had lived rightly prior to the communion. The Anglicans say you should be confirmed before you are allowed to participate.

You will note what all of these churches have in common. It is no longer "the Lords Table" but man's table. Instead of Christ deciding who is worthy, and applying His discipline, it is man's table and man's discipline which overrides all. The sheer arrogance and thoughtlessness of men, taking over the church from Christ, putting their rules in place, making the decision as to who is worthy and who is not worthy, rather than letting Christ rule, is worthy of censure. How dare they do this? But they do because they are carnal and they have a carnal following.

Paul says, by way of warning, *1Co 11:27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. 1Co 11:28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. 1Co 11:29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.*

There is the possibility of physical sickness and even death for abusing the Lord's Supper and if is as if it carries the seeds of poison to the unworthy person, like the "dust of the Tabernacle" in the jealousy offering, *Num 5:16 And the priest shall bring her near, and set her before the LORD: Num 5:17 And the priest shall*

take holy water in an earthen vessel; and of the dust that is in the floor of the tabernacle the priest shall take, and put it into the water: Num 5:18 And the priest shall set the woman before the LORD, and uncover the woman's head, and put the offering of memorial in her hands, which is the jealousy offering: and the priest shall have in his hand the bitter water that causeth the curse: Num 5:19 And the priest shall charge her by an oath, and say unto the woman, If no man have lain with thee, and if thou hast not gone aside to uncleanness with another instead of thy husband, be thou free from this bitter water that causeth the curse: Num 5:20 But if thou hast gone aside to another instead of thy husband, and if thou be defiled, and some man have lain with thee beside thine husband: Num 5:21 Then the priest shall charge the woman with an oath of cursing, and the priest shall say unto the woman, The LORD make thee a curse and an oath among thy people, when the LORD doth make thy thigh to rot, and thy belly to swell; Num 5:22 And this water that causeth the curse shall go into thy bowels, to make thy belly to swell, and thy thigh to rot: And the woman shall say, Amen, amen.

If we think that we can cuckold the Lord, the elements of the Table will turn in us, and what was meant as Holy, shall become a curse, *1Co 11:30 For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. 1Co 11:31 For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged*. If only we would judge our own hearts instead of leaving it to other, who do not see the darkness in us, we would not fall foul of God's judgement.

When we do get judged it has a salutary effect, *1Co 11:32 But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world*. God's discipline is for the improvement and the benefit of the man, that he become more Christ like, *Heb 12:8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Heb 12:9 Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?* ***Heb 12:10*** *For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Heb 12:11 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby*.

Paul concludes, *1Co 11:33 Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. 1Co 11:34 And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come*.

I close with this thought from Grace Communion International,

So the Lord's Supper helps us look upward, to Christ, and be mindful that true life can only be in him and with him. When we are aware that Jesus lives in us, we also pause to think what kind of home we are giving him. Before he came into our lives, we were habitations of sin. Jesus knew that before he even knocked on the door of our lives. He wants to get in so he can start cleaning things up. But when Jesus knocks, many people try to do a quick tidy-up before they open the door. However, we are humanly unable to cleanse our sins—the most we can do is hide them in the closet. So we hide our sins in the closet, and invite Jesus into the living room. Eventually we let him into the kitchen, and then the hallway, and then a bedroom. It is a gradual process. Eventually Jesus gets to the closet where our worst sins are hidden, and he cleans them, too. Year by year, as we grow in spiritual maturity, we surrender more of our lives to our Saviour. We let him live in us.

40..... The Problem of Spiritual Gifts

Preparatory reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 12 verses 1 – 31.

In Paul's preamble to this part of his letter, the words "spiritual *gifts"* do not exist, rather it is "spirituals", and the word "*gifts*" has been supplied in the text, as you can see, it is in italics in the AV. Here is a better translation, *1Co 12:1 Now concerning* ***the spirituals*** *(πνευματικός), brethren, I would not have you ignorant. 1Co 12:2 Ye know that as nations ye were led away unto those dumb *idols, howsoever ye might be led. 1Co 12:3 Wherefore I make known to you, that no one speaking by God's Spirit saith, Jesus is anathema; and no one can say, Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Spirit.* NENT.

I suppose Paul is saying that now you Corinthians are Christian, there is a division between true believers, when it comes to the "spirituals" as opposed to the "carnals", *1Co 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ*. The difference is that, "*that no one speaking by God's Spirit saith, Jesus is anathema; and no one can say, Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Spirit".* When it comes to talking about Jesus, somebody in possession of the Holy Spirit cannot say that Jesus is anathema, cursed, and somebody not in possession of the Holy Spirit cannot say "*Jesus is Lord"*. It is a test of the individual, more so than the possession of a spiritual manifestation, like "tongues".

None the less, God has given a range of different manifestations, *1Co 12:8 For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; 1Co 12:9 To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the*

gifts of healing by the same Spirit; 1Co 12:10 To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues, isn't it amazing, that God gave this number of "spirituals" to the Corinthian church, despite their many faults. There is hope for us.

These gifts that Paul enumerates, the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, the gifts of healing, the working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, various kinds of tongues, the interpretation of tongues, are distributed among the saints, *1Co 12:4 Now there are diversities of charisma, but the same pneuma. 1Co 12:5And there are differences of diaconate, but the same Lord. 1Co 12:6 And there are diversities of workings, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. 1Co 12:7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.* I have tried to give the underlying translation to sense what the Corinthians heard.

Do you see that? The Lord doesn't invest the gifts in one or two people but in all of God's people, "*the manifestation of the Spirit is given* ***to every man*** *to profit withal*", it is given to each for a purpose. It is not like so many churches today, where the so called gifts are very limited in number, and limited to who has them, like the minister and deacons. This Corinthian assembly was simply buzzing with the different manifestations of the Spirit, the diversities of charisma. But having lots of πνευματικός does not mean they were used every day.

When I look at churches today, I must admit that they seem to be so different to the days of Paul, the days of the "spirituals", and the days of the πνευματικός. It is like the breath has come out of the pneumatic tyre, and the churches have gone completely flat. I see people who claim to have spiritual manifestations and some churches which call themselves charismatic today, but I don't get fooled by people who say and do not live up to the reality. I knew a Pentecostal brother where I worked, whose eyes were getting very poor, but one day he came in and said he was healed, and as an act of faith or folly, threw his glasses in the bin. He was seen later with a new pair of spectacles. Then, there was the wife of a charismatic minister, who believed in the gifts, but her faith didn't extend beyond doctors, because she was made of quite a bit of metal and was awaiting a hip replacement to add to her list. I think she has double standards.

I say this from the position I see the world, and I am happy to admit that I don't know all the Lord is doing with people, but from my view, in my little corner, πνευματικός do not seem anywhere near the level that they appeared in Corinth, and that is a very generous statement. They may be imitated and even desired, but it is wishful thinking to say that they are anywhere near the individual level of those times. The various theological theories about the paucity or even the non-existence of the gifts today, is not generated from a biblical exegesis of the

gifts, but is generated to explain the various views, interpretations, of why they should not exist. The way these people talk about the decline is always by inference and never by fact.

I do not see any reason given in the New Testament, as to why the gifts should have ceased, or should have even declined over the New Testament period. That said, I must observe that they appear to be dormant in our time, that is except the "ministerial" gifts, but again, the number of people claiming a "calling", have entered the ministry without hearing the voice of God calling them, but rather some circumstance which they interpret as providential or some person suggesting their calling to them.

Remember, the gifts are πνευματικός, spiritual not carnal, thus they are supernatural, as opposed to human generated, that is they are not of this life, but intervene in this life, to benefit the church spiritually, pneumatically. The gifts are sovereign gifts, "*the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally* ***as he will***". Were the πνευματικός permanent gifts, or one off gifts to be used at a specific time? By this I mean, for example, was the πνευματικός of healing, given to a person to be used at his command, as he please, or was it given to be used as the Spirit willed, and on specific occasions as directed?

I knew a very compassionate Christian whose mother was ill, and she longed for the gift of healing, and would have been continually using the gift, to heal the sick, if she had had it, and there would not have been any sickness at all in the land. Have you ever wondered why this sort of indiscriminate healing is never seen in the Bible, countries healed, nations healed? The gift is however seen in individuals, who are the specific targets of the Spirit, *Act 3:2 And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; Act 3:3 Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms. Act 3:4 And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. Act 3:5 And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Act 3:6 Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk*.

Similarly, individuals are targets of salvation and a word of knowledge, *Act 8:26 And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. Act 8:27 And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, Act 8:28 Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Act 8:29 Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot*. Philip did not go where he wanted but where the Spirit wanted.

Does the person with the gift of prophecy use it all of the time, indiscriminately, 24 hours of the day, or does he only use it only when directed by the Spirit, and then to say something that will help his listeners? Like Agabus warning of the famine to come, *Act 11:27 And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. Act 11:28 And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. Act 11:29 Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea*. It was natural aid administered in a supernatural way.

Or on another occasion when Agabus warned Paul of the dangers of going up to Jerusalem, *Act 21:10 And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. Act 21:11 And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. Act 21:12 And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem*. It was a very specific and personal message.

The discernment of spirits was a peculiar gift, given it seems not to see evil all around us, but evil intention, and act as a warning to the brethren, *Act 8:18 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Act 8:19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. Act 8:20 But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Act 8:21 Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Act 8:22 Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. Act 8:23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity*.

This was also seen in the discerning the heart of Ananias, *Act 5:1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, Act 5:2 And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. Act 5:3 But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Act 5:4 Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. Act 5:5 And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things*.

So have the gifts ceased? You can listen to the propaganda of those knowledgeable men who say yes they have, without any experience of the gifts themselves, or you can read the Bible for yourself and ponder the matter. The

Epistle to the Corinthians may give the impression that the gifts are present in super-abundance in the assembly, but after you have used the gift of healing in an assembly, how is it used when you have healed everyone, and what about the subsequent years when the gift might be redundant? What about prophecy, do we expect the people to be given continual prophesies instead of studying for ourselves? Prophecy in the church might be quite a lot less frequent than we imagine, and not just given for entertainment or to say the gift is present. The gift of miracles is also for a purpose not for entertainment. The purpose of the gifts is crucial to the manifestation of them and if they serve no purpose in the assembly, they will not exist, but likewise they will not have ceased.

There may be another reason that the πνευματικός do not appear so frequently. The apparent cessation could be because we are a carnal church with very little spiritual aspirations. I have been to a number of Pentecostal churches, and the" gifts" or what is supposed to be gifts, have been used for personal reasons. Tongues have been spoken without any interpretation, healing for the sake of show, and no permanent healing at that, prophecies not directed at anybody so it is hard to say what they mean and overall no attempt to edify the brethren. No wonder many think that Pentecostalism is a sham.

Another reason is, may be, that we do not earnestly desire the welfare of our brethren. Some churches are the most unwelcoming places you can go to, because people go for their own reasons and are not interested in you. The πνευματικός are to build them up, edify them and we should desire them for this purpose, not self-aggrandisement. We sit in churches, week after week, we see Christians, perhaps we greet them, but we do not see them from week to week and they might as well not exist. We go to church for our own reasons, not to bless the saints. If there is no blessing the saints, there is no need of the gifts. Do we ever consider the spiritual needs of our brethren?

Also, we do not have the type of ministry that will support the exercise of gifts, because we have manmade organisations and institutions blocking their use. We sit under a manmade ministry without the opportunity of even choosing a hymn. It is all organised for us and anything that detracts from the "service" is regarded as alien.

Well there are a number of reasons that we do not see the gifts and they are not because they have ceased, but because we do not use them correctly. The Corinthian church is warned about this, so do we need another warning? Do we have to wait for the Lord to send us a message again because we neglected to hear it the first time? No, the message comes, like all of God's messages to "him that has ears", and those who do not hear, can go on with their carnal worship, until they are finally cut off from God.

41..... The Problem of Isolation

Preparatory reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 12 verses 1 – 31.

We have discussed the πνευματικός and their use within the Assembly of God's people and the things which may limit or inhibit the manifestation of them. We now look at how the gifts, the πνευματικός, function together.

Do women have pneumaticos, "spirituals" (the gifts), the same as the men? It is a very important question because it bears upon the verse a little later, *1Co 14:35 And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home:* ***for it is a shame for women to speak in the church***, and are they just passive observers. By the way, I also remind you that "the church" is not that brick built steeple house, but a gathering of the people of God, and they can gather at all times anywhere. It is not the building where you gather it's who you gather together with, wherever.

In 1 Corinthians 14 verse 35 it says they ought to be silent but in 1 Corinthians11 it says, *1Co 11:5* ***But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head****: for that is even all one as if she were shaven*. The woman can pray and prophecy covered but at the same time she must be silent??? There must be something wrong in our interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14. Is Paul saying that women must never say anything when gathered together with men?

Women prophesying in the assembly was in keeping with what the apostle Peter said was characteristic of the New Covenant gift of the Spirit, predicted in Joel 2, *Act 2:17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: Act 2:18 And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:* Who's going to prophesy? Answer, the sons and daughters.

Look at the list of women prophetesses, Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Isaiah's wife, Anna, the four daughters of Philip and there can be no doubt that women are gifted. The women were with the men in the upper room, and I have no doubt that was where the tongues of fire sat upon each of them, *Act 1:14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. Act 1:15 And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,).*

My conclusion is that the gifts, πνευματικός, were distributed equally among the men and woman, with the proviso that there was the observation of the Divine

order as detailed in 1 Corinthians 11 when ministering them, *Gal 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither* ***male nor female****: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus*. In Christ we are equal in some things but not in the order of creation, as we have observed. I will return to answer the question of "silence" when we get to 1 Corinthians 14.

So it is not a male orientated assembly with the women as passive passengers, or a male oriented body possessing the gifts, it is a composite body of both Christian men and Christian women, *1Co 12:12 For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. 1Co 12:13* ***For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. 1Co 12:14 For the body is not one member, but many***.

The body is ONE, into which we have been baptised by one Spirit, but the ONE body has many parts or limbs (μέλος). Here is stated the UNITY of the spirit, *Eph 4:1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, Eph 4:2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Eph 4:3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*. I am now going to go into the Old Testament to show that God's intention of bring Israel back into ONE body, was foretold and that this occurred at the time of Jesus, not at the end of the age. Keep this in mind as we now digress before coming back to the New Testament subject of unity.

If we go back to the time of Ezekiel, when the Jews were languishing in Babylon, the Lord gives them hope, *Eze 36:22 Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went. Eze 36:23 And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD, saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. Eze 36:24* ***For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Eze 36:25 Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.*** *Eze 36:26 A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. Eze 36:27 And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. Eze 36:28 And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God*.

This is the promise of the New Covenant, *Heb 10:19 Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, Heb 10:20 By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; Heb 10:21 And having an high priest over the house of God; Heb 10:22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith****, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water***.....and.....*Heb 8:10 For this is* ***the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days****, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: Heb 8:11 And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. Heb 8:12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more*.

Now it just does not end there, because if you go into the next chapter, you see what a desperate state the Jews were in, they were like bones scattered in a dry valley, *Eze 37:7 So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. Eze 37:8 And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them. Eze 37:9 Then said he unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. Eze 37:10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army. Eze 37:11* ***Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel:*** *behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Eze 37:12 Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. Eze 37:13 And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, Eze 37:14 And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD*.

God took Ezekiel, somehow, into a valley full of dry bones and told him to speak to the dead. He was to tell the bones that God would make breath enter the bones and they would come to life, just as in the creation of man when He breathed life into Adam, *Gen 2:7 And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living s*oul. The bones represented the dead and the disgraced Israelites, “In the thinking of ancient Israel (and the ancient Near East), an unburied corpse with exposed remains was a shocking disgrace to the dead. These **bones** were obviously denied proper burial. The bones lay on the surface of the valley, like the remains of corpses denied a proper burial and left for scavenging buzzards.

As an Israelite and especially as a priest, Ezekiel knew how important was the proper treatment of human corpses." (Block)

"The vision may have been prompted by the actual memory of seeing the Israelite dead strewn outside Jerusalem or scattered along the desert road that led Ezekiel and his companions into exile." (Taylor). "Dry bones are not only dead; they have been long dead. Bones are what remain when life has passed. If something never had life, it would not leave bones. Yet when something has been dead so long, we give up hope it will ever live again."

God said, that Israel will be restored to her land in blessing under the leadership of "David*, Eze 37:24 And David my servant* ***shall be king over them****; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them*. Jesus was the King of the Jews and scion of David, *Luk 1:31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. Luk 1:32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and* ***the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David****: Luk 1:33 And he shall* ***reign over the house of Jacob for ever****; and of* ***his kingdom there shall be no end****.*

This website is typical of those who hold dispensational views, "Got Questions" web site,

> The reviving of the dry bones signified God's plan for Israel's future national restoration. The vision also, and most importantly, showed that Israel's new life depended on God's power and not the circumstances of the people. Putting "breath" by God's Spirit into the bones showed that God would not only restore them physically but also spiritually. The **Israelites residing in the Holy Land today are not the fulfilment of this prophecy.** It will be fulfilled when God re-gathers believing Israelites to the land (Jeremiah 31:33; 33:14–16) and **Christ returns to establish His Millennial Kingdom** (Matthew 24:30–31).

They expect you to believe the whole thing is delayed until the end time, the millennium, which their special glasses allow them to see in Matthew. But look at the two quotations from Jeremiah, *Jer 31:33 But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people*. It is an exact quote of Hebrews Chapter 8 which we have mentioned already and is fulfilled in every believer, NOW, not in some latter day.

The other verses quoted, Jer *33:14 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel and*

to the house of Judah. Jer 33:15 In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. Jer 33:16 In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The LORD our righteousness, is about Christ's kingdom and is fulfilled NOW.

Now there are two phases of coming together in Ezekiel Chapter 37,

1. The bones become people.
2. The people become one.

There were the dry bones coming to life and then there was a promise that God would unite the disparate tribes of Israel, *Eze 37:15 The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, Eze 37:16 Moreover, thou son of man,* ***take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions****: Eze 37:17 And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand. Eze 37:18 And when the children of thy people shall speak unto thee, saying, Wilt thou not shew us what thou meanest by these? Eze 37:19 Say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand. Eze 37:20 And the sticks whereon thou writest shall be in thine hand before their eyes. Eze 37:21 And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: Eze 37:22 And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all: Eze 37:23 Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwellingplaces, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God.*

What did God mean by bringing the dry bones together? How did God achieve this? What are the two sticks and what do they mean? When does all of this occur?

42..... Bringing the Body Together

Preparatory reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 12 verses 1 – 31.

I want to make a few remarks on Hebrews Chapter 8 before I pick up our topic, of "Ezekiel's dry bones", and clarify some things, *Heb 8:7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. Heb 8:8 For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a* ***new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah:*** *Heb 8:9 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. Heb 8:10 For* ***this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel*** *after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: Heb 8:11 And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. Heb 8:12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. Heb 8:13 In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away*.

Book	Date (A.D.)	Book	Date (A.D.)
James	45–49	Philippians, Philemon	63
Galatians	49	1 Peter	63–64
1 & 2 Thessalonians	51	1 Timothy	63–66
Mark	50s or 60s	Titus	63–66
Matthew	50s or 60s	Hebrews	64–68
1 Corinthians	55	2 Peter	66
2 Corinthians	56	2 Timothy	67
Romans	57–58	Jude	68–80
Luke	60	John	85–90
Acts	61	1, 2, 3 John	85–90
Colossians, Ephesians	61	Revelation	90–95

Who is "Israel", the house of Israel? Is it the Jews as opposed to the Gentiles? It cannot be, because, **G***al 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. Gal 3:29 And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.* Galatians had been written about 20 years earlier, so "the Jews and Gentiles are one" is an established teaching of the church. Is it the Old Testament people only? No, it cannot be, there is not a two tier Christianity, a "them and us" in the New Testament.

But Israel is composed of two bodies of people, *Rom 9:6 Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are* ***not all Israel, which are of Israel****: Rom 9:7 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called*. There is the "carnal seed" and there is the "spiritual seed", "***not all Israel, which are of Israel*** ", earthly and heavenly, and since Hebrews is speaking of those in Christ, the spiritual seed, I take it that Israel is the heavenly people, *Gal 6:14 But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. Gal 6:15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. Gal 6:16 And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and* ***upon the Israel of God***.

To return, there are two phases of Israel's coming together in Ezekiel Chapter 37,

1. The bones become people.
2. The people become one.

The dry bones of Israel are brought to life but we must ask what this refers to. Is it the dead Israelites like Zedekiah and those who followed him into exile, *2Ki 24:18 Zedekiah was twenty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. 2Ki 24:19 And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. 2Ki 24:20 For through the anger of the LORD it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, until he had cast them out from his presence, that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon*. If these wicked people, who died for their sin and rebellion, are now given another bite at the cherry of life, then there is another chance for everyone, and it does not matter what you do now.

However, we see from the story of the rich man and Lazarus, *Luk 16:26 And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.* There is no coming back in physical terms, so the dry bones of Israel must refer to something else. The general resurrection perhaps? Most assuredly, yes, the dead shall come out of the graves, *Eze 37:12 Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel*.

There is also another possibility and that is Christ giving life to the "dead in trespasses and sins", *Joh 5:24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Joh 5:25 Verily, verily, I say unto you, **The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live**.*

It is a figure of the revived nation of Israel, not national Israel which was put into captivity for its sin, *Rom 9:6 Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Rom 9:7 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. Rom 9:8 That is, **They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed***. It was the spiritual seed, the seed of Christ not the earthly nation.

There are two worlds which to a degree mirror each other, the natural fleshly world and the supernatural spiritual world. Take for example the earthly Tabernacle of Moses. It had a spiritual counterpart in heaven, *Heb 8:4 If then he were on earth, he would not be a priest: seeing that there would be others to offer gifts according to the law. Heb 8:5 Who serve unto the example and*

shadow of heavenly things. As it was answered to Moses, when he was to finish the tabernacle: See (saith he) that thou make all things according to the pattern which was shewn thee on the mount.

The earthly passes away and the spiritual comes to life. The children of the flesh have their counterpart in the children of the promises. We died in Adam and are made alive in Christ, "***The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live"***. This, I think, is the meaning of the dry bones. The spiritual seed, the dead elect, hear the voice of Christ, as they did from the beginning and throughout the Old Testament, these are shown as the nation, once reckoned dead but alive unto Christ.

The two sticks are about the unification of Israel, *Eze 37:19 Say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand. Eze 37:20 And the sticks whereon thou writest shall be in thine hand before their eyes. Eze 37:21 And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land.*

You will recall that on the death of King Solomon, the nation was torn in two, *1Ki 12:22 But the word of God came unto Shemaiah the man of God, saying, 1Ki 12:23* ***Speak unto Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, king of Judah****, and unto all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the remnant of the people, saying, 1Ki 12:24 Thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house; for this thing is from me. They hearkened therefore to the word of the LORD, and returned to depart, according to the word of the LORD. 1Ki 12:25* ***Then Jeroboam built Shechem in mount Ephraim****, and dwelt therein; and went out from thence, and built Penuel. 1Ki 12:26 And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: 1Ki 12:27 If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah. 1Ki 12:28 Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. 1Ki 12:29 And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan*.

This shows that the split in the nation was to be healed and rejoined, Israel would no longer consist of two nations but it would be ONE. When does all of this occur? In the distant future, beyond the time of the New Testament or does it occur in the New Testament. In the New Testament, and Israel is expanded to

include the Gentiles. Paul argues that not all Israel are Israel, "*. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children*". So the seed of Abraham, not the carnal seed, but the spiritual seed, is now Israel, and the Gentiles have been gathered in to this body, *Rom 9:23 And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Rom 9:24 Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? Rom 9:25 As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. Rom 9:26 And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God*.

It says it in slightly different words in Ephesians, *Eph 2:11 Don't forget that you are Gentiles. In fact, you used to be called "uncircumcised" by those who take pride in being circumcised. Eph 2:12 At that time you did not know about Christ. You were foreigners to the people of Israel, and you had no part in the promises that God had made to them. You were living in this world without hope and without God, Eph 2:13 and you were far from God. But Christ offered his life's blood as a sacrifice and brought you near God. Eph 2:14* ***Christ has made peace between Jews and Gentiles, and he has united us by breaking down the wall of hatred that separated us. Christ gave his own body*** *Eph 2:15 to destroy the Law of Moses with all its rules and commands.* ***He even brought Jews and Gentiles together as though we were only one person****, when he united us in peace*. CEV.

We have seen that this essential unity was foretold in the bringing together of the elect, both Jews and Gentiles, but that leaves the final question, "How did God achieve this?" There is the highly mistaken view that it is all of grace and you do not have anything to do but sit tight and receive the blessings. It is like this privileged, self seeking generation that expects everything to be given to it. It all comes off the money tree or out of the hole in the wall, and doesn't cost us anything. We wait to be showered with blessings at no expense to ourselves.

Wrong! *Php 2:12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence,* ***work out your own salvation with fear and trembling****. Php 2:13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure*. If we will become quickened to life eternal, if we will spring to life, then we have to do something, like the Corinthians are doing, with their multitude of correctional items, changing their behaviour from self seeking hedonists, fornicators, idolaters, drunks, or as Paul puts it, *1Co 6:9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, 1Co 6:10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. 1Co 6:11* ***And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye***

are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus*, and by the Spirit of our God*.

The process has begun, the resurrection of the living dead has started, and we must learn that "*that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption*". We must learn to be "one in Christ", and this is where we return to our passage. It requires effort to be a Christian, *Luk 13:24 Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.*

Instead of this fleshly fighting for supremacy, of being an individual, we have to see that God's πνευματικός is given to bring us together not tear us apart, *1Co 12:15 If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? 1Co 12:16 And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? 1Co 12:17 If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?*

We would look at people with horror, if we saw them with one big eye and no ears or mouth. They would be repulsive creatures that went around with huge feet, no hands and a small head, *1Co 12:18 But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. 1Co 12:19 And if they were all one member, where were the body? 1Co 12:20 But now are they many members, yet but one body. 1Co 12:21 And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you*. It would not be a normal body.

The body, to be a normal body, must function as a whole, and they must care for one another, *1Co 12:22 Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: 1Co 12:23 And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. 1Co 12:24 For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: 1Co 12:25 That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another*. If we are truly one we shall rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who morn, we shall suffer together, *1Co 12:26 And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it*.

Some of the χάρισμα are better than others though not more important, *1Co 12:27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. 1Co 12:28 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. 1Co 12:29 Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all*

teachers? are all workers of miracles? 1Co 12:30 Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret? 1Co 12:31 But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.

Paul comes up with an even better way to unity than the χάρισμα, the gifts. Gifts are hung upon a tree but fruits grow from the branches and this is the way Paul shows as better, it is not by χάρισμα, it is by love, ἀγάπη, *1Co 13:1 What if I could speak all languages of humans and of angels? **If I did not love others**, I would be nothing more than a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 1Co 13:2 What if I could prophesy and understand all secrets and all knowledge? And what if I had faith that moved mountains? I would be nothing**, unless I loved others**. 1Co 13:3 What if I gave away all that I owned and let myself be burned alive? I would gain nothing, **unless I loved others**. 1Co 13:4 **Love** is kind and patient, never jealous, boastful, proud, or 1Co 13:5 rude. Love isn't selfish or quick tempered. It doesn't keep a record of wrongs that others do. 1Co 13:6 Love rejoices in the truth, but not in evil. 1Co 13:7 Love is always supportive, loyal, hopeful, and trusting*. CEV.

Love is not all you need, but it is a condiment, it flavours the χάρισμα, it salts the gifts and makes them tasty to the receiver of the blessing. It adds to the genuineness of that which is being done on your behalf and we see that the gift isn’t just served up, but served up with a genuine kindness.

43..... The Problem of a Lack of Love

Preparatory reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 13 verses 1 – 13.

Corinthians shows a most excellent way that goes beyond the exercise of gifts and that is way of love. It was an Old Testament doctrine that is paramount to the relationships that we have between God and man,

1. *Deu 6:5 And **thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart**, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.*
2. *Lev 19:18 Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but **thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself**: I am the LORD.*

Jesus said that there was no greater command that outweighed these, *Mar 12:28 And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first **commandment** of all? Mar 12:29 And Jesus answered him, The first of all the **commandments** is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: Mar 12:30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is **the first commandment**. Mar*

12:31 And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. ***There is none other commandment greater than these***.

Of course you knew that didn't you, but what do you know about this command, *Joh 14:15* ***If ye love me, keep my commandments***. It's a big step from knowing about something to knowing the truth in the soul. You will say of course I follow the commands of Christ, but do you deceive yourself by only following your favourite one's, only following the ones that you really like? I didn't read that Jesus said "if you love me you will follow the commands that you like". No, He says you follow Him, and you follow His commands and that is how you show your love to Him. If you do not follow His commands you do NOT love Him, despite your protestations that you do. Paul's "way of excellence" is the way of love, but if we do not show that love to Christ, we are not showing it to anyone.

Are the commands of Jesus only in the Gospels or are they throughout the writings of the saints of the New Testament? *1Co 14:37 If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.* The commandments of the Lord Jesus are all that Paul writes, and all that Jesus taught, and all that are described in the New Testament given by the other authors. There are some 800 of the commands in the New Testament and they are not optional if you call yourself a Christian. They are not optional if you are to love Jesus. The love which Paul talks of is the result of a life sacrificed for Jesus.

Just look at some from Matthew Chapters 6 and 7, and ask yourself truthfully if you do these, *Mat 6:3* ***When you give to the poor****, don't let anyone know about it. Mat 6:4 Then your gift will be given in secret. Your Father knows what is done in secret, and he will reward you.....Mat 6:16* ***When you go without eating****, don't try to look gloomy as those show-offs do when they go without eating. I can assure you that they already have their reward.....Mat 6:19 Don't store up treasures on earth! Moths and rust can destroy them, and thieves can break in and steal them. Mat 6:20 Instead,* ***store up your treasures in heaven****, where moths and rust cannot destroy them, and thieves cannot break in and steal them. Mat 6:21 Your heart will always be where your treasure is.....Mat 6:31* ***Don't worry*** *and ask yourselves, "Will we have anything to eat? Will we have anything to drink? Will we have any clothes to wear?" Mat 6:32 Only people who don't know God are always worrying about such things. Your Father in heaven knows that you need all of these.....Mat 7:1* ***Don't condemn others, and God won't condemn you****. Mat 7:2 God will be as hard on you as you are on others! He will treat you exactly as you treat them.....Mat 7:12* ***Treat others as you want them to treat you****. This is what the Law and the Prophets are all about.....Mat 7:24 Anyone who hears and obeys these teachings of* ***mine is like a wise person who built a house on solid rock****. Mat 7:25 Rain poured down, rivers flooded, and winds beat against that*

house. But it did not fall, because it was built on solid rock. That is a tiny number of commandments that Christ gave to us.

Now be honest, do you give to the poor, I don't mean your second hand rubbish at your annual clearout, I mean do you regularly support you poor brethren? Do you worry about life? Are you a talebearer and a gossip who has nothing nice to say about some people or anyone, if so then you are heading for condemnation. Do you really treat others how you want to be treated or are you selective in your friendships? And what about your life, what are you building it upon? The solid foundation of Jesus?

Do you know what it even means to store up your treasures in heaven? How do you transport treasure to heaven, *Luk 12:32 Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Luk 12:33 Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. Luk 12:34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*. I think that all of the points which I have mentioned come down to a root problem, lack of love to Jesus and to fellow men.

I think on that small sample of Jesus' commandments we have failed miserably. Why do we fail? I think that the primary reason that we fail is because of the way that we use God's book. We use it to get messages from God to suit our situations, like the person that I knew, who was dying from cancer. The family went from church to church, healer to healer, flip plopped the Bible for an answer, and then settled on one verse, *2Ki 20:5 Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the LORD. 2Ki 20:6* ***And I will add unto thy days fifteen years****; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. 2Ki 20:7 And Isaiah said, Take a lump of figs. And they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered*.

This word of the Lord was to Hezekiah, yet it was taken personally, and appropriated for the person suffering. Of course we conveniently forgot the bit where it said, "*and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake*" and concentrated upon, "***And I will add unto thy days fifteen years***". Alas, it wasn't to be for them.

We may just read the Bible as a habit, because we think we should. We may read it for knowledge of God's word and to become educated. We may read it for comfort, *Rom 15:4 For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have*

hope. The Bible has a lot of uses but do we ever use it to find out the commands of Christ, to dig in to see what we are required to do, to personalise it? I don't think so or else we would be up to date with the 800 or so commands of Jesus, and we know we are not because we don't know half of them. We would better study the Bible to find out just what we should be doing to honour Jesus, to love Him.

We just go around clanking and banging on with our self-righteousness, but I am nothing without showing the love of God, *1Co 13:1What if I could speak all languages of humans and of angels? If I did not love others, I would be nothing more than a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal*. *1Co 13:2 What if I could prophesy and understand all secrets and all knowledge? And what if I had faith that moved mountains? I would be nothing, unless I loved others*. And what if I made the ultimate sacrifice and gave away everything, even my life to be burned alive, it doesn't count for a hill of beans, if I don't do it out of love, *1Co 13:3 What if I gave away all that I owned and let myself be burned alive? I would gain nothing, unless I loved others*.

It is like I was saying, the gifts do not profit us one bit unless they are administered in love, *1Co 13:4 Love is kind and patient, never jealous, boastful, proud, or 1Co 13:5 rude. Love isn't selfish or quick tempered. It doesn't keep a record of wrongs that others do. 1Co 13:6 Love rejoices in the truth, but not in evil. 1Co 13:7 Love is always supportive, loyal, hopeful, and trusting*. Don't hurry past the door of those attributes. Let's hear them again, "**Love is kind, patient, never jealous, not boastful, not proud, not rude, not selfish, not quick tempered, not keeping a score of wrongs, it rejoices in the truth, not in evil, it is always supportive, loyal, hopeful, and trusting**".

I make that about 15 things we should have, to show we are loving people. That's 15 things we can adopt straight away to show that we are loving people and that can form part of our personal devotions for the next month, or not if we don't think we need them. It is wonderful that we have the apostle Paul teaching us the intricacies of the gifts and how to use them. What a blessing that man is. We do not just get the laws of Christ, but we also get how we are to do them and what we need to do to get the right

First Corinthians Chapter 12 corrected misunderstandings about spiritual gifts among the Christians in Corinth. Like today, some believers thought that those able to speak in tongues or prophesy were more spiritual than the others. But Paul taught that every spiritual gift was given by God for a reason and was essential to the church, the body of Christ, but he concluded by promising to show them "a still more excellent way" to serve each other.

This "more excellent" way is shown in Chapter 13. This Chapter might have been something that Paul had composed at another time, or added before the

message was sent. Chapter 13 could well stand on its own as a treatise about love. The epistle to the Corinthians could go from Chapter 12 to Chapter 14, without Chapter 13, but it is inserted as a parenthesis on love.

“Paul begins this chapter by describing just how useless, even destructive, spiritual gifts are when not applied from the standpoint of love. Displays of tongues, prophetic powers, and supernatural spiritual knowledge may be impressive, but they are worthless if not used as intended by God, out of a heart of love for Him and other believers. Even the most spiritual of activities, selling everything to give to the poor and sacrificing one's life to be burned for the sake of others, gains a person nothing if not given in love”, *1Co 13:8 Love never fails! Everyone who prophesies will stop, and unknown languages will no longer be spoken. All that we know will be forgotten. 1Co 13:9 We don't know everything, and our prophecies are not complete. 1Co 13:10 But what is perfect will someday appear, and what isn't perfect will then disappear*.

Paul says that when we look back on our lives it will all seem very childish that we even thought like that, *1Co 13:11 When we were children, we thought and reasoned as children do. But when we grew up, we quit our childish ways. 1Co 13:12 Now all we can see of God is like a cloudy picture in a mirror. Later we will see him face to face. We don't know everything, but then we will, just as God completely understands us*.

There are 3 qualities that the apostle Paul says we have now, Faith, Hope and Love, *1Co 13:13 For now there are faith, hope, and love. But of these three, the greatest is love*. When we get to Glory, two of them will be fulfilled and not be required and the other shall be with us forever. Faith looks forward, *Heb 11:1Now faith is the substantiating of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* Darby. We see the reality with the eye of faith, it enables us to put flesh upon an idea, but we have not entered or seen the reality of it yet. It is something that we hope for, *Rom 8:25 But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.* “Hope implies little certainty but suggests confidence or assurance in the possibility that what one desires or longs for will happen” (Miriam Webster). Faith and hope are with us now to encourage us.

When we get to heaven, faith and hope will have done their work. They will have sustained us on the journey but will no longer be needed on arrival, for we have the reality before us, which we hoped for. Love though is a quality that we carried through and forever, it’s like part of the DNA, who we are. It will be a part of our nature, it will define us as beings, it will never leave us, and so it is important to work on it now, *Luk 7:46 My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Luk 7:47 Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little*. You can love a lot or a little, it’s up to you.

One of the tests of a great friendship, even a definition of friendship, is Love, *Pro 17:17 A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity*. Friendship loves the person through the roughness of their character, their faults, their behaviour, because it too, sees beyond this life to the redeemed creature that we will be. If you cannot see your worst enemy in heaven you cannot have the love of Christ in your life.

44..... The Problem of Speaking in Tongues. Part 1

Preparatory reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 14 verses 1 – 25

The apostle reiterates his remark about the guiding power of love before continuing his discourse on the gifts, *1Co 14:1 Love should be your guide. Be eager to have the gifts that come from the Holy Spirit, especially the gift of prophecy*. CEV.

Paul now comes back to the use of tongues, in Greek γλῶσσα, and as I have said before, the word "unknown", as in "unknown tongues", is not in the original. In Revelation, γλῶσσα refers to languages which are known and understood among some humans, *Rev 14:6 And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and* ***tongue****, and people*. I have used the CEV to bring this point out, *1Co 14:2 If you speak languages that others don't know, God will understand what you are saying, though no one else will know what you mean. You will be talking about mysteries that only the Spirit understands*. CEV.

There were many people in the 1970's called Charismatics, who I remember said that if you did not have the gift of tongues, then you were not a complete Christian. They had linked speaking in tongues with the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and they were using this as the test that you had truly come to God and it was sometimes called the second blessing. In the cult, popularly known as Pentecostalism, a charismatic religious movement that gave rise to a number of Protestant churches in the United States in the 20th century, it held as its belief that all Christians should seek a post-conversion religious experience called "baptism with the Holy Spirit." It takes its name from the Holy Spirit's descent upon the first Christians in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.

It started in the Holiness Movement, and the roots of the Azusa Street Revival and the Pentecostalism it birthed, which are entwined with the Holiness Movement of the late nineteenth century. This was a renewing movement within the Wesleyan tradition that emphasized complete sanctification and taught that moral perfection is available to Christians. It was marked by a heavy emphasis on personal holiness, most often displayed through a close adherence to the law as a means of drawing near to God. In general, early Pentecostal theology took

Wesleyan theology as its starting point, it then added to it certain new elements. Here is a short history of the mission in Azuza street,

> By 1900, southern churches were completely separated by race; Christianity had divided along the colour line. But in Los Angeles, white bishops and black workers, men and women, Asians and Mexicans, white professors and black laundry women gathered at a former AME church building on Azusa Street in downtown Los Angeles. (The **African Methodist Episcopal Church**, usually called the AME Church or AME, is a Methodist denomination based in the United States.) This interracial congregation worshipped under the leadership of a black pastor, William J. Seymour.
>
> For over three years, what historians call the Azusa Street Revival conducted three services a day, seven days a week. Word of the revival was spread abroad through “The Apostolic Faith”, a paper that Seymour sent for free to some 50,000 subscribers. So many missionaries spread the word from Azusa that within two years the movement had spread to over fifty nations.
>
> Apart from its interracial congregation, Azusa's most striking characteristic was the practice of speaking in tongues, which was seen as a sign that an individual was baptized by the Holy Spirit. Previously, few Pentecostals had spoken in tongues, and the languages they used were foreign but known. Seymour and his followers spoke in unknown tongues *(sic!*), understood only by God, a practice widely adopted by Christians who believed it was a sign that God was breaking down barriers to spread the Gospel around the world.
>
> When Charles Fox Parham, a white Pentecostal pioneer and teacher of Seymour's (he had allowed Seymour to attend his Bible School on the condition that he sit outside a door left partially ajar), visited Azusa Street in October of 1906, he denounced the Revival as a "darky camp meeting." "What good can come from a self-appointed Negro prophet?" scoffed the mainstream newspapers.
>
> Azusa Street dissolved amidst the racial politics of unrequited love. In May 1908, Seymour married Jennie Evans Moore. Clara Lum, the Mission Secretary and administrative helper for the newspaper, disapproved of their marriage so much that she left for Portland, taking with her the paper's mailing lists, containing the names of 50,000 subscribers. Without them, Seymour couldn't continue publishing.
>
> Seymour came to believe that blacks and whites worshipping together was a surer sign of God's blessing and the Spirit's healing presence

than speaking in tongues. The fact that the church had nationally split along racial lines meant that the charismatic ideal of cooperation with the Spirit had been foiled by the forces of racism.

Once the whites defected, the Azusa Street Mission became almost entirely black. Still, its message echoes through history. It made a distinctive contribution to the historical evolution of religion in America by involving blacks, women, and the poor at all levels of ministry, and it was the birthplace of two major Pentecostal denominations.

Sadly the Scripture was neglected by this new denomination, *1Co 12:30 Not everyone can heal the sick.* ***Not everyone can speak different kinds of languages****. Not everyone can tell what these languages mean*. As Paul had emphatically taught, not all spoke in tongues.

It is worth commentating on the origin of language at this point so that we can get a better understanding of γλῶσσα. We go back in time to ancient Babylon when, the Bible tells us, the earth was of one language, *Gen 11:1 At first everyone spoke the same language, Gen 11:2 but after some of them moved from the east and settled in Babylonia, Gen 11:3 they said: Let's build a city with a tower that reaches to the sky! We'll use hard bricks and tar instead of stone and mortar. We'll become famous, and we won't be scattered all over the world. Gen 11:5 But when the LORD came down to look at the city and the tower, Gen 11:6 he said: These people are working together because they all speak the same language. This is just the beginning. Soon they will be able to do anything they want. Gen 11:7 Come on! Let's go down and confuse them by making them speak different languages—then they won't be able to understand each other. Gen 11:8 So the people had to stop building the city, because the LORD confused their language and scattered them all over the earth. That's how the city of Babel got its name*. CEV.

The origin of language was not evolutionary but religious, in fact it was the result of a judgement upon mankind. The people were scattered as a result of their different languages, and they had lost cohesion and the resulting disunity split them apart. What was to them their Independence Day was to become a day of confusion. They could no more achieve their aim of becoming a united nation, achieving their own goals and in the process they removed Jehovah from having anything to do with them.

This attitude towards God, of independence, is still conducted within the churches and the individuals in it. Paul has in Corinthians, been at pains to get everybody to work together to become united, to become One Body, and yet they persist in individualism. The attitude is not however towards one another, it is towards Jesus, and they do not serve Him totally. How would you describe a Christian? It is a person who is totally subject to Jesus in everything. Everything

of Christ takes first place, and what Jesus says governs your life. The things of this world, the worldly people in it, your family and friends are subject to what Jesus says, not what you say. He says this, *Mat 10:34 Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. Mat 10:35 For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. Mat 10:36 And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. Mat 10:37* ***He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*** *Mat 10:38 And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. Mat 10:39 He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it*. You can fool yourself that you are serving Him but you do not fool Him.

I will take up Paul's theme of carnality again here, *1Co 15:45 And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. 1Co 15:46 Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. 1Co 15:47 The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. 1Co 15:48* ***As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly***. The γλῶσσα were earthly tongues, languages of men, and the first time that man was divided from man, was on an earthly basis. The second time man is divided from man is on a spiritual basis, a heavenly basis, and that fixes the great gulf or chasm between them, the ones who follow Jesus and the ones who do not.

The manifestation of γλῶσσα at Pentecost parallels the events at Babel. One event, at Babel, was dividing man between man on earth and the second event, at Pentecost, was dividing man from man, in heaven. It also had another opposite effect, namely, uniting men of faith by giving him the common language of the Spirit. So there are a number of reasons for the γλῶσσα in Acts and Corinthians and it is necessary to see what is the meaning of each, in its context.

I think that Pentecost was uniting Israel in a pure language, the language of the Spirit, as was prophesied in, *Zep 3:9 For then will I turn to the people a* ***pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consen****t. Zep 3:10From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering. Zep 3:11In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against me: for then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain. Zep 3:12I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD. Zep 3:13The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them*

afraid. It was also prophesied through Joel, *Joe 2:28 And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: Joe 2:29 And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. Joe 2:30 And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke*.

Pentecost is Babel reversed, and the people united, restored, but this time, not for the people to build a name for themselves, *Gen 11:4 And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. Gen 11:5 And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded*. This time Jesus not men would build a kingdom, and would build His Church, and the gates of hell would not prevail against it. That is one reason for the manifestation of divers languages, all telling the glories of God, **and all the Jews understanding the message in their own language.** The Apostles and brethren spoke in tongues and the others heard. When they were baptised afterwards, and received the Holy Spirit, did it follow that they spoke in tongues?

The tongues, γλῶσσα, at Corinth have different use, *1Co 14:22 Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe*. We shall examine this in more detail next.

We should observe that γλῶσσα has an earthly form and a heavenly form. There is the Spiritual counterpart of the carnal or earthly tongues, *1Co 13:1 What if I could speak all **languages of humans and of angels**? If I did not love others, I would be nothing more than a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal*. CEV. It seems that there are languages which are known to men, these are the languages of Pentecost, and languages which are not known to men, namely the angelic realm, *1Co 14:2 If you speak languages that others don't know, God will understand what you are saying, though no one else will know what you mean. You will be talking about mysteries that only the Spirit understands*. This is where I think the idea of “unknown tongues” or “unknown languages” came from. The language given as a gift differed, in that it was not understood by the recipient, and so it differed from the Pentecostal γλῶσσα which was **known**.

45..... The Problem of Speaking in Tongues. Part 2

Preparatory reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 14 verses 1 – 40

Pentecostal tongues were known languages, *Act 2:8 And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Act 2:9 Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Act 2:10 Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Act 2:11 Cretes and Arabians**, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God**.* The apostles spoke in known languages, and so I would expect that anybody speaking in "Pentecostal tongues" is speaking in an identifiable language and they are talking about "***the wonderful works of God***", not garbled rubbish.

The other occasions when the Pentecostal tongues occurred were,

1. *Act 8:14 The apostles in Jerusalem heard that some people in **Samaria** had accepted God's message, and they sent Peter and John. Act 8:15 When the two apostles arrived, they prayed that the people would be given the Holy Spirit. Act 8:16 Before this, the Holy Spirit had not been given to anyone in Samaria, though some of them had been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Act 8:17 Peter and John then placed their hands on everyone who had faith in the Lord, and they were given the Holy Spirit.*
2. *Act 10:44 While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit took control of everyone who was listening. Act 10:45 Some Jewish followers of the Lord had come with Peter, and they were surprised that the Holy Spirit had been given to **Gentiles**. Act 10:46 Now they were hearing Gentiles speaking unknown languages and praising God. Peter said, Act 10:47 "These Gentiles have been given the Holy Spirit, just as we have! I am certain that no one would dare stop us from baptizing them."*
3. *Act 19:3 "Then why were you baptized?" Paul asked. They answered, "Because of what John taught." Act 19:4 Paul replied, "**John baptized people** so that they would turn to God. But he also told them that someone else was coming, and that they should put their faith in him. Jesus is the one that John was talking about." Act 19:5 After the people heard Paul say this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Act 19:6 Then Paul placed his hands on them. The Holy Spirit was given to them, and they spoke unknown languages and prophesied.*

This fulfilled the word, *Act 1:8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in **Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria**, and unto **the uttermost part of the earth**.* They had also overtaken the message of John the Baptist and it now became the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. This is, I think, the limit of the Pentecostal γλῶσσα, or tongues.

As we suggested, the γλῶσσα, languages, had a different meaning in Acts to its meaning in Corinthians. In Corinthians it is for another purpose, not for showing

unity, but for self edification, building yourself up, *1Co 14:4 By speaking languages that others don't know, you help only yourself. But by prophesying you help everyone in the church*.
This had become a problem in the Corinthian assembly so that Paul had to mention γλῶσσα and its use specifically. The “tongue” is singled out by James as the most unruly member of our bodies, *Jas 3:3 We put bits in the mouths of horses to make them obey us, and we have control over everything they do. Jas 3:4 The same thing is true for ships. They are very big and are driven by strong winds. Yet, by using small rudders, pilots steer ships wherever they want them to go. Jas 3:5 In the same way the tongue is a small part of the body, but it can brag about doing important things. A large forest can be set on fire by a little flame. Jas 3:6 The tongue is that kind of flame. It is a world of evil among the parts of our bodies, and it completely contaminates our bodies. The tongue sets our lives on fire, and is itself set on fire from hell*.

The tongue must be governed if it is to be used at all, *1Co 14:3 But when you prophesy, you will be understood, and others will be helped. They will be encouraged and made to feel better. 1Co 14:4 By speaking languages that others don't know, you help only yourself. But by prophesying you help everyone in the church.* Prophecy is a word that is understood as opposed to a tongue which is not understood. If you babble on in a tongue it will serve no purpose to others but prophecy helps the others in a church. So if people insist that they speak in tongues and there is no interpretation, they should shut up, because they are not concerned with edifying anybody but themselves. They are just ignorant, selfish showmen.

Paul does however put a ban on tongues, γλῶσσα, to the contrary, they are a welcome gift, but it must be used properly, *1Co 14:5* ***I am glad for you to speak unknown languages****, although I had rather for you to prophesy. In fact, prophesying does much more good than speaking unknown languages,* ***unless someone can help the church by explaining what you mean****.* He illustrates his point by drawing a picture of a man coming into the assembly and speaking in a foreign language. What earthly good is it, because it doesn’t show what God gave you to share, it doesn’t increase you in knowledge, it doesn’t give you a prophecy or a teaching? *1Co 14:6 My friends, what good would it do, if I came and spoke unknown languages to you and didn't explain what I meant? How would I help you, unless I told you what God had shown me or gave you some knowledge or prophecy or teaching?*

It is like an un-tuned orchestra, there is not a clear distinction between any of the musical instruments, *1Co 14:7 If all musical instruments sounded alike, how would you know the difference between a flute and a harp?* Tongues, γλῶσσα, is like an uncertain call to arms, *1Co 14:8 If a bugle call isn't clear, how would you know to get ready for battle? 1Co 14:9 That's how it is when you speak unknown*

languages. If no one can understand what you are talking about, you will only be talking to the wind.

It is about making sense of something, understanding what is being said*, 1Co 14:10 There are many different languages in this world, and all of them make sense. 1Co 14:11 But if I don't understand the language that someone is using, we will be like foreigners to each other*. What good is the gift, γλῶσσα, to others if it is not translated, so, *1Co 14:12 If you really want spiritual gifts, choose the ones that will be most helpful to the church*.

The person in possession of this gift should really pray that they are given the power to interpret it, so they can help other people know the message, *1Co 14:13 When we speak languages that others don't know, we should pray for the power to explain what we mean. 1Co 14:14 For example, if I use an unknown language in my prayers, my spirit prays but my mind is useless*, or barren. The spirit of a man seeks communion with his God, without using his mental faculties. This reveals the fact that a person may possess, γλῶσσα, and use them in prayer, howbeit he is not always privy to what he says, and needs help, *Rom 8:26 In certain ways we are weak, but the Spirit is here to help us. For example, when we don't know what to pray for, the Spirit prays for us in ways that cannot be put into words. Rom 8:27 All of our thoughts are known to God. He can understand what is in the mind of the Spirit, as the Spirit prays for God's people*. CEV.

Sometimes you are praying in the Spirit, which I take to be the manner in which the "*Spirit prays for us in ways that cannot be put into* words", and at other times you pray with your understanding*,* knowing what you said, *1Co 14:15 Then what should I do? There are times when I should pray with my spirit, and times when I should pray with my mind. Sometimes I should sing with my spirit, and at other times I should sing with my mind*. It's like when you sing, sometimes it is with your spirit, for instance when you are joyful and you just sing, sing anything without thought, and at other times, it is with consideration of the words, what they mean, and it is with the mind.

You may be praising God in your meeting, praising in your spirit, praising in tongues, but the strangers will not know what you say, and they will not know to say Amen, *1Co 14:16 Suppose some strangers are in your worship service, when you are praising God with your spirit. If they don't understand you, how will they know to say, "Amen"?* Paul had the gift of tongues, much more than any of the Corinthians, so he says, but he would rather speak sense, than in a language that cannot be understood, *1Co 14:17 You may be worshiping God in a wonderful way, but no one else will be helped. 1Co 14:18 I thank God that I speak unknown languages more than any of you. 1Co 14:19 But words that make sense can help the church. That's why in church I had rather speak five words that make sense than to speak ten thousand words in a language that others don't know*.

By now you will have got the picture. If someone comes to you who is a stranger, an unbeliever, they will think that you are a maniac, Greek μαίνομαι, *1Co 14:20 My friends, stop thinking like children. Think like mature people and be as innocent as tiny babies. 1Co 14:21 In the Scriptures the Lord says, "I will use strangers who speak unknown languages to talk to my people. They will speak to them in foreign languages, but still my people won't listen to me." 1Co 14:22 Languages that others don't know may mean something to unbelievers, but not to the Lord's followers. Prophecy, on the other hand, is for followers, not for unbelievers. 1Co 14:23 If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad (μαίνομαι)?* You are a maniac to them because you are babbling,

What does this mean and why pull in a Scripture from the Old Testament? *1Co 14:21 In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord*. First of all, the words “of men” is added, so the original reads,”with other tongues and other lips will I speak to this people”. It is necessary to look at the whole of the prophecy, which is a “woe” to the drunkards of Ephraim.

Isa 28:3 The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim, shall be trodden under feet: Isa 28:4 And the glorious beauty, which is on the head of the fat valley, shall be a fading flower, and as the hasty fruit before the summer; which when he that looketh upon it seeth, while it is yet in his hand he eateth it up. Isa 28:5 In that day shall the LORD of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of his people, Isa 28:6 And for a spirit of judgment to him that sitteth in judgment, and for strength to them that turn the battle to the gate. Isa 28:7 But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment. Isa 28:8 For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean. Isa 28:9 ***Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts****. Isa 28:10 For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little: Isa 28:11* ***For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people****. Isa 28:12 To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear. Isa 28:13 But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken***.**

The Ephraimites were a disgrace to the Nation, they were drunkards, the place where they were was unclean, full of sick and filth, in which the priest and prophet stumble along in. The passage doesn't seem to make much sense and why should it? These people stagger along, talking gibberish they are so drunk, not making sense of anything they say, and these are the teachers and prophets of the nation. *Isa 28:9* ***Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts****.* God will instruct the children, the babies at the breasts, they will have a better understanding than these drunks.

The people have neglected the word of God for such a long time, that He will send people of another tongue to correct them, He will make people with stammering lips to speak to them because they don't hear their own language and are hardly likely to hear another one, *Isa 28:11* ***For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people****.* It did not matter who spoke to the drunken Ephraimites, they couldn't make sense of it in their condition.

Now take the thoughts in Isaiah and transfer them to Corinthians, *1Co 14:20 Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men. 1Co 14:21 In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord. 1Co 14:22 Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe*.

Just as the drink sodden Ephraimites were too sozzled to understand what was being said to them, and they were spoken to in "***stammering lips and another tongue***" and they still did not hear God, Paul gives that as a reason that the unbeliever is given the "babble" of a tongue and it is a sign to them, *1Co 14:22 Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe,* ***but to them that believe not***. With interpretation, tongues become a prophecy, and it is profitable for believers, "*but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe*".

The two conditions for tongues are made clear, so an orderly assembly with people prophesying, will have more of an impact upon the unbeliever, since it will reveal their hearts, *1Co 14:23 Suppose everyone in your worship service started speaking unknown languages, and some outsiders or some unbelievers come in. Won't they think you are crazy? 1Co 14:24 But suppose all of you are prophesying when those unbelievers and outsiders come in. They will realize that they are sinners, and they will want to change their ways because of what you are saying. 1Co 14:25 They will tell what is hidden in their hearts. Then they will kneel down and say to God, "We are certain that you are with these people*."

It is a pity that we do not have more detail on how we should deploy the gifts, but I suppose that using them with love explains most of how we should use them.

46. The Problem of the Resurrection of the Dead. Part 1

Preparatory reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 15 verses 1 – 58

The Corinthians were having some difficulty in understanding the resurrection and what it meant for them, so Paul goes into that subject. **Firstly, we look at the resurrection of Jesus**, because if that is not a historical fact, then we might as well give up here and now, *1Co 15:19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable*. Why do we put so much hope in the resurrection? It is crucial because it opens up eternity to us, not just a life here, but a life beyond here, with Christ.

Many people think that there is a life after death, and there is for all men, but it will be different for those who go into eternity without Christ. You can think what you will, but there is no greater authority on the afterlife than the Bible, and it is given by One who came back from the dead, namely Jesus. The other ideas are "just so" stories written by mortal men, fables, fairy tales, imaginations, which may make them feel secure but having no substance, are false. The resurrection of Jesus is a historical fact and this Paul is at pains to point out, is the cornerstone of Christianity and the hope of His people.

So Paul starts off with a creed, "I believe", a statement of faith, and it is put in such a nice way that it is memorable, *1Co 15:1 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; 1Co 15:2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain*. The Gospel of Paul, preached to the Corinthians, is a cornerstone and pillar of faith. We are saved by this Gospel, if we keep in mind the things Paul says. It is important to our spiritual health that we understand it.

Paul declares the fact of Christ's death is "according to the scriptures", *1Co 15:3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that **Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures***. The death followed the pattern laid out in the Scriptures, the man of sorrows on whom the Lord laid the iniquity of us all. The model sent from heaven, the Tabernacle and all of its contents spoke of the Messiahs sacrifice. The sacrifices for sin, each showing some peculiarity of His offering. The holy days, each leading up to the Day of

Atonement, all of these things and more showed how "***Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures***".

It was all laid out, not quite so obvious to the unregenerate mind, but as the people of faith moved closer to God, they saw glimpses of the Messiah, until the day came, when He would take on flesh as the incarnate deity. And when He died, it was not only the death of a good man and for a life well lived, it fulfilled a purpose because He died as a sacrifice for His people's sin. There are so many self-righteous individuals that they discount the death of Christ as their personal sin offering, choosing to put themselves along side of Him, worshipping God, and yet their sin is not forgiven. These lack true faith, *Heb 11:6 But without faith no one can please God. We must believe that God is real and that he rewards everyone who searches for him*. CEV.

The Scripture not only foretold of the death of Christ it foretold, prophesied, of His resurrection, *1Co 15:4 And that he was buried, and that* ***he rose again the third day according to the scriptures***. I will only give one of many texts describing this event, to show that the Old Testament spoke about Jesus resurrection. It occurs in the Book of Psalms, *Psa 16:9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. Psa 16:10 For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption*. It is a Psalm written by David, and so you might logically think that this verse applies to David. It does not!

A better translation is, *Psa 16:10 I am your chosen one. You won't leave me in the grave or let my body decay. Psa 16:11 You have shown me the path to life, and you make me glad by being near to me. Sitting at your right side, I will always be joyful*. CEV. Now if it is speaking of David, then it is wrong, because David is still in the tomb of his father's and it cannot refer to him.

The New Testament makes clear it was David speaking in the Spirit of Christ, *Act 2:23 God had already planned and decided that Jesus would be handed over to you. So you took him and had evil men put him to death on a cross. Act 2:24 But God set him free from death and raised him to life. Death could not hold him in its power. Act 2:25 What David said are really the words of Jesus, "I always see the Lord near me, and I will not be afraid with him at my right side. Act 2:26 Because of this, my heart will be glad, my words will be joyful, and I will live in hope. Act 2:27 The Lord won't leave me in the grave. I am his holy one, and he won't let my body decay. Act 2:28 He has shown me the path to life, and he makes me glad by being near me." Act 2:29 My friends, it is right for me to speak to you about our ancestor David. He died and was buried, and his tomb is still here. Act 2:30 But David was a prophet, and he knew that God had made a promise he would not break. He had told David that someone from his own family would someday be king. Act 2:31 David knew this would happen, and so he told us that Christ would be raised to life. He said that God would not leave*

him in the grave or let his body decay. Act 2:32 All of us can tell you that God has raised Jesus to life! CEV.

Scripture speaks abundantly about the death and the resurrection of Jesus, so it should not come as a surprise to us when it is mentioned here. It has been known for hundreds of years before the events which Paul speaks about. That is the legacy that Paul builds upon, and the new witnesses of Jesus are, *1Co 15:5 And that he was seen of Cephas, then* ***of the twelve****: 1Co 15:6 After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. 1Co 15:7 After that, he was seen of James; then of* ***all the apostles****.*

The twelve are mentioned with Peter, and sequentially He was seen by 500 at once, and then of James, and the apostles. Now I thought the twelve were the apostles, in which case it is tautology, it is mentioned twice. But that view is taken because we have been taught that there are only twelve apostles, but what if there were more? Not only the twelve, as some suppose, but also the seventy disciples, *Luk 10:1 After these things the Lord* ***appointed*** *other seventy also, and* ***sent*** *them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come*.

The word for "appointed" in the Greek is ἀναδείκνυμι, which is used one other time only, for the appointment of the replacement apostle, Matthias. The word, "sent", is ἀποστέλλω, the same root as apostle. It seems to me that the 70 were apostles, doing the same task as the 12 apostles. In some ancient sources, Luke the writer of the Acts of the Apostles, is listed among the 70.

The 500 are not mentioned in the Gospels, so where did they come from and why are they not mentioned at Pentecost with the 120? And who found out about them? I suspect, in answer to the last question, is that it came out during Luke's formulation of his Gospel and was conveyed to his fellow apostle Paul. It is certainly not mentioned by any of the other Gospel writers. *1Co 15:4 He was buried, and three days later he was raised to life, as the Scriptures say. 1Co 15:5 Christ appeared to Peter, then to the twelve. 1Co 15:6 After this, he appeared to more than five hundred other followers. Most of them are still alive, but some have died.*

I speculate that the 500 might have been a remnant of the 5,000 that Jesus knew from Galilee. They would have seen the proof of the resurrection in the risen Lord, and that Jesus did not just give them earthly bread, He was the bread of life. Being in the Galilee region, they would have stayed separate from the 120 disciples at Jerusalem.

Did Jesus appear in the same body after the resurrection? Did He look the same? I don't think so, *Joh 20:15 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou?*

whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, ***Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him****, and I will take him away. Joh 20:16 Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master*. Mary did not recognise Jesus. The disciples were held from seeing Him, *Luk 24:16 But their eyes were holden that they should not know him…….. Luk 24:30 And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. Luk 24:31 And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight*. The disciples failed to recognise him again in Galilee, *Joh 21:3 Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing. Joh 21:4 But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but* ***the disciples*** *knew not that it was Jesus*.

Could the sinful eye of the unbeliever see Him in the resurrection? The eye that saw Jesus was spiritual not carnal, as with Paul, *Act 9:4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? Act 9:5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. Act 9:6 And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. Act 9:7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless,* ***hearing a voice, but seeing no man***.

If Jesus did not look the same as before the crucifixion, then how do we know the disciples saw Jesus and not some impostor? If they did not know for certain what his physical bodily characteristics were like, how could they know for certain it was Jesus? One clue is given, *Luk 24:35 And they told what things were done in the way, and how* ***he was known (γινώσκω) of them in breaking of bread***. We saw in our study of Luke's Gospel that γινώσκω was knowledge gained by experience, not a knowledge gained by facts. There was in Jesus' person, something that the disciples had learned by the experience of being with Him, for instance the way He broke bread, etched in their memory from the Passover night.

So convinced were these disciples that they were ready to lay down their lives for that belief that Jesus had been raised again. Our Hero is not described in the flesh which is surprising. It may be so that we do not make graven images of the Infinite Deity. In a novel, the chief characters are fleshed out so that you can bring what is written to life, to get involved in the plot, to imagine them better, but not so with Jesus. John the Baptist, His cousin, we know was a wilderness dweller, *Mat 3:4 And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey*. John was very distinctive but of Jesus appearance we know virtually nothing. But the

people Paul speaks of as having seen him in 1 Corinthians Chapter 15, bear witness of Jesus being alive.

Paul did not see the resurrection first hand, but he did see the risen Jesus, *1Co 15:8 And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time*. We infer that Paul's experience on the Damascus road did cause him to see Christ, not just hear the voice of Christ. I would not limit Paul's experience to him alone. All of the Christians have had an experience of the risen Christ. All Christians through the ages have known that encounter with Christ that suddenly, He becomes a living truth of their lives. This is a very real experience and marks one of the differences between the believer and the unregenerate man. Many people who go to church have never had that personal encounter with Christ.

Paul says of himself, *1Co 15:9 For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God*. He is not afraid to speak about that man that he was. That man that he was is dead and Paul can speak of him as if speaking about somebody else, but he does no distance himself from that corpse, because it was him once. He is open to talking about that man because of the change Christ has worked in him. Some Christians do not like speaking about the person that they were and get embarrassed about it, perhaps because the "old man" is not quite dead.

But it is that change which people see and they want to hear about it, that is what is so important to people, they like a good genuine confession. They like to hear of the mystery of conversion and forgiveness, because that change is ultimately what man looks for, that is the thing that will save him from himself, and a genuine encounter with Christ makes it possible. A living Christ, a breathing Jesus, is essential to this testimony. A dead Christ is a good story but with a fairy tale ending. A living Jesus gives a real story with an everlasting meaning.

Paul's change is real, Jesus resurrection is real, and he wants us to know the story. The first part of the story is the many witnesses to Jesus resurrection. Paul is at pains to give his testimony, *1Co 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. 1Co 15:11 Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed*.

It wasn't just me says Paul, there were others, and "*whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed*".

47. The Problem of the Resurrection of the Dead. Part 2

Preparatory reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 15 verses 1 – 58

Having established that Jesus was seen alive after three days, Paul now moves to establish why the resurrection is so important for us, **the second point being that the resurrection of Christ is the foundation of our faith in the general resurrection.**

What is the general resurrection? An important Bible fact in understanding the Last Day is that of the 'General Resurrection'. General resurrection or universal resurrection is the belief in a resurrection of the dead, or resurrection from the dead (Koine: ἀνάστασις [τῶν] νεκρῶν, anastasis [ton] nekron; literally: "standing up again of the dead". The Bible teaches that on the Last Day, all people will be resurrected either to everlasting life or everlasting damnation.

Joh 5:24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Joh 5:25 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. Joh 5:26 For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; Joh 5:27 And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Joh 5:28 Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, Joh 5:29 ***And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation***.

That's right, you and I are going to be taken before Christ and weighed in His balance, and we shall not be able to resist Him*, Php 2:10 So at the name of Jesus everyone will bow down, those in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. Php 2:11 And to the glory of God the Father everyone will openly agree, "Jesus Christ is Lord*!" CEV. I do not know whether we shall be dragged kicking and screaming, but everyone will get there.

The widespread erroneous teaching of pre-millennialism negates this Bible teaching by teaching multiple resurrections of the dead and the living at different times. I found this fairly common view from an evangelical website "Got Questions",

> Whether there is a distinction between the rapture and the second coming is a matter of much debate. Some Christians believe that the rapture is to be distinguished from the second coming of Jesus Christ.

> At the rapture, the Lord comes “in the clouds” to meet us “in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). At the second coming, the Lord descends all the way to the earth to stand on the Mount of Olives, resulting in a great earthquake followed by a defeat of God’s enemies (Zechariah 14:3–4). Other Christians believe the biblical warrant for separating the rapture from the second coming is lacking. Further, even among those who believe the rapture is a separate event from the second coming, there is a significant amount of debate regarding when the rapture will occur in relationship to the tribulation. The primary interpretations on this aspect of the rapture discussion are pretribulationism, midtribulationism, pre-wrath, and posttribulationism.!

The word “rapture” does not occur in our Bible, but it is supposed to be a Latin form of “caught up”, *1Th 4:16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: 1Th 4:17 Then we which are alive and remain* ***shall be caught up*** *together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. 1Th 4:18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words*.

I am one of those simple souls that see it as Jesus returns in Glory, He raises ALL of the dead, He judges His enemies, and ushers in the age of His Glory. But I am getting ahead of myself. Paul has proved Jesus’ resurrection and now comes to the question, “If Jesus was raised from the dead, what happens to us when we die?” Do we get a resurrection and is it the same as Jesus resurrection? Well, the fact of Christ’s resurrection, proves that there is such a thing as a resurrection, something the Sadducees denied, *1Co 15:12 Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead*? There is therefore a resurrection of the dead and if you would like to look in the Gospels you will see that Jesus was involved in bringing three people back to life,

1. The widow’s son, *Luk 7:12 Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. Luk 7:13 And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. Luk 7:14 And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. Luk 7:15* ***And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak****. And he delivered him to his mother*.
2. Jairus’ daughter, *Mar 5:38 And he cometh to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and seeth the tumult, and them that wept and wailed greatly. Mar 5:39 And when he was come in, he saith unto them, Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth. Mar 5:40 And they laughed him to scorn. But when he had put them all out, he*

taketh the father and the mother of the damsel, and them that were with him, and entereth in where the damsel was lying. Mar 5:41 And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise. Mar 5:42 And straightway the damsel arose, and walked; for she was of the age of twelve years. And they were astonished with a great astonishment.

3. Lazarus, *Joh 11:41 Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. Joh 11:42 And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. Joh 11:43 And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. Joh 11:44 And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go*.

By the way, these are Old Testament resurrections. Clearly there are other resurrections and there was a precedent, but it is not known whether this information was available at the time, so Paul says to the Corinthians, “you cannot say the dead aren’t raised if Jesus was raised”. That is the argument, that Jesus resurrection is not unique, and not unusual, and that if Jesus was raised from death, there is no reason that you will not be raised from death.

But what if it is not true, what if you die and stay dead, *1Co 15:13 But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: 1Co 15:14 And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain*. This raises the problem that the Corinthians would be following a dead man, a corpse, and their faith is empty, and Paul’s preaching is empty. This is the position of those people who call themselves cultural Christians but don’t believe in the resurrection.

> Cultural Christianity is religion that superficially identifies itself as “Christianity” but does not truly adhere to the faith. A “cultural Christian” is a nominal believer—he wears the label “Christian,” but the label has more to do with his family background and upbringing than any personal conviction that Jesus is Lord. Cultural Christianity is more social than spiritual. A cultural Christian identifies with certain aspects of Christianity, such as the good works of Jesus, but rejects the spiritual aspects required to be a biblically defined Christian.
>
> Some people consider themselves “Christians” because of family background, personal experience, country of residence, or social environment. Others identify as “Christian” as a way of declaring a religious affiliation, as opposed to being “Muslim” or “Buddhist.” Famed scientist and atheist Richard Dawkins refers to himself as a “cultural Christian” because he admires some of the ceremonial and

philanthropic aspects of Christianity. Dawkins is not born again; he simply sees “Christianity” as a label to use.

We, of course, reject cultural Christianity, because it does not accept the whole Gospel, and is indeed as Paul says, *Gal 1:6 I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Gal 1:7 Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. Gal 1:8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed*.

Some people just like to trim parts of the faith off and still call it Christianity but it is no longer a vibrant Christianity, it is a misshapen Christianity, it is a dead Christianity, *1Co 15:14 And if Christ wasn't raised to life, our message is worthless, and so is your faith.* CEV. Paul tells us that we have become false witnesses, *1Co 15:15 Yea, and* ***we are found false witnesses*** *of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. 1Co 15:16 For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: 1Co 15:17 And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins*, or as the CEV puts it, *1Co 15:17 Unless Christ was raised to life, your faith is useless, and you are still living in your sins. 1Co 15:18 And those people who died after putting their faith in him are completely lost*.

People come to Christ for different reasons, and often Christ Himself is not one of the reasons. For instance, if the person is not born again, they will not see the importance of Christ as the Saviour of mankind, they will not see the importance of His death and resurrection, and they will only see Him as a moral figure, not a spiritual figure.

The parable of the sower shows how people drop by the wayside as they do not go on with Jesus. *Mat 13:19 The seeds that fell along the road are the people who hear the message about the kingdom, but don't understand it. Then the evil one comes and snatches the message from their hearts. Mat 13:20 The seeds that fell on rocky ground are the people who gladly hear the message and accept it right away. Mat 13:21 But they don't have deep roots, and they don't last very long. As soon as life gets hard or the message gets them in trouble, they give up. Mat 13:22 The seeds that fell among the thornbushes are also people who hear the message. But they start worrying about the needs of this life and are fooled by the desire to get rich. So the message gets choked out, and they never produce anything. Mat 13:23 The seeds that fell on good ground are the people who hear and understand the message. They produce as much as a hundred or sixty or thirty times what was planted*. CEV.

No, we are in for the long haul, and those who think that this life is all are shown to be wrong by the resurrection of Christ, *1Co 15:18 Then they also which are*

fallen asleep in Christ are perished. 1Co 15:19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. Some do not believe, others by circumstance fall away, but he who endures to the end shall be saved. Fanny Crosby, though blind, had the hope of the everlasting, by keeping the Cross close,

Jesus, keep me near the cross,
There a precious fountain;
Free to all, a healing stream,
Flows from Calv'ry's mountain.

In the cross, in the cross
Be my glory ever,
Till my ransomed soul shall find
Rest beyond the river.

That which the Romans ordained for a punishment, became the means of eternal life to all the faithful. The cross and the resurrection, is the foundation of our faith, *Rom 4:23 Now it was not written on his account alone that it was reckoned to him, Rom 4:24 but on ours also, to whom, believing on him who has raised from among the dead Jesus* ***our Lord, Rom 4:25 who has been delivered for our offences and has been raised for our justification****, it will be reckoned*. Darby. You see, you may be delivered from sin by Jesus death, but it is the resurrection of Jesus which conveys the benefits of His work on the cross and that is completed in the resurrection of the dead.

And so Paul finishes the second part of the resurrection and shows, "**that the resurrection of Christ is the foundation of our faith in the general resurrection."**

48. The Problem of the Resurrection of the Dead. Part 3

Preparatory reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 15 verses 1 – 58

The third point Paul makes is, **"What is to be deduced from Christ's resurrection?"** Having established the resurrection of Jesus as a historical fact, and having established that the resurrection is the foundation of our faith in the general resurrection, we look at the outcomes of this.

We see that Jesus is the firstfruit, *1Co 15:20 But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept*. "The firstfruits" is a common expression found in both Old and New Testaments. It is used in Scripture with

both literal and figurative meanings. So when Paul said Christ was “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep , he was using terminology and imagery rich in history and meaning. Firstfruits or first fruits is an agricultural term, initially mentioned in the book of Exodus when Moses is leading God’s people out of captivity in Egypt. God instructed the Israelites to give up the first of their increase so that they could understand the value of God’s blessings, *Exo 22:29 —Thou shalt not delay the fulness of thy threshing-floor and the outflow of thy winepress. The firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me. Exo 22:30 Likewise shalt thou do with thy calf, with thy sheep: seven days shall it be with its dam; on the eighth day thou shalt give it me. Exo 22:31 —And ye shall be holy men unto me; and ye shall not eat flesh torn in the field: ye shall cast it to the dog*. Darby.

Firstfruits became one of the three feasts of Israel, *Exo 23:14 Thrice in the year thou shalt celebrate a feast to me. Exo 23:15 Thou shalt keep* ***(1)*** *the* ***feast of unleavened bread****, (thou shalt eat unleavened bread seven days, as I have commanded thee, in the time appointed of the month Abib; for in it thou camest out from Egypt; and none shall appear in my presence empty;) Exo 23:16 and* ***(2)*** ***the feast of harvest****, the* ***first-fruits of thy labours which thou hast sown in the field****, and* ***(3)*** ***the feast of in-gathering, at the end of the year****, when thou gatherest in thy labours out of the field. Exo 23:17 Three times in the year all thy males shall appear in the presence of the Lord Jehovah.* Darby.

Firstfruits = **בִּכּוּר** was anything that you had gained increased in, the “new money” so to speak of the year’s growth, the very first growth of your field in the year, and it was taken in a basket and given to the Lord. I think that it differed to tithing, or “tenthing” of **ALL** the increase of your goods. Firstfruits was an initial offering of thanksgiving before the tithe was gathered in, *Deu 26:1 And it shall be, when thou art come in unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, and possessest it, and dwellest therein; Deu 26:2 That thou shalt take of the first of all the fruit of the earth, which thou shalt bring of thy land that the LORD thy God giveth thee,* ***and shalt put it in a basket, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose to place his name there****. Deu 26:3 And thou shalt go unto the priest that shall be in those days, and say unto him, I profess this day unto the LORD thy God, that I am come unto the country which the LORD sware unto our fathers for to give us. Deu 26:4 And the priest shall take the basket out of thine hand, and set it down before the altar of the LORD thy God.* The feast acknowledged God as the owner and provider of all that was in the world and that man was only a tenant.

The tithe followed the firstfruits, *Deu 26:12 Every year you are to give ten percent of your harvest to the LORD. But every third year, this ten percent must be given to the poor who live in your town, including Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows. That way, they will have enough to eat*. The “poor” tithe

was given twice in a 7 year cycle of the land. The 7th year was a Sabbath of rest for the land.

The firstfruits were the product of last year's harvest, the seed that was to come. One seed that was sown, became the many in subsequent harvests, the many seeds that would come after it, *Gal 3:16 Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but* ***as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ***. The firstfuits were a token of things to come, a promise, just as Jesus, the firstfruit, was a token of the many sons and daughters that would come to Him.

From the beginning of humanity, by one man, Adam, came death, *Rom 5:12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned*. Sinned actively. We were according to this, by **seminal identity**, by our association with Adam's seed, active partakers in Adam's sin. Just as when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, Levi, not yet born, was considered to have paid tithes, as well as Abraham, *Heb 7:8 And here dying men receive tithes; but there one of whom the witness is that he lives; Heb 7:9 and, so to speak, through Abraham,* ***Levi also, who received tithes, has been made to pay tithes.*** *Heb 7:10 For he was yet in the loins of his father when Melchisedec met him*. Adam was the seed from which all mankind sprouted, and sin passed from his corruption, down the long ages.

Everyone in Adam dies because of one man's sin, so every man in Jesus lives by the power of His resurrection. Does this refer to the people who are righteous only, or all mankind? If only the righteous are raised by Christ, who raises the unrighteous? Christ is the Master of life, *Dan 12:2 And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth* ***shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.*** Just as in Adam, all die, yet some of those in Adam are quickened despite their sin, so in Christ all are made alive, but some are sent to hell, *Act 24:14 But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: Act 24:15 And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow,* ***that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust***.

So then, there is the death and life sequence, *1Co 15:21 For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. 1Co 15:22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive*. This is eschatology made simple, the doctrine of last things, and it is, *1Co 15:23 But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. 1Co 15:24 Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power*.

Stated succinctly, there are no comings and goings, no millennial reign, no rapture, no setting up an earthly kingdom, no battle with satan after this, that is in Paul's simple statement of the end! Contrast this with the pre-millennial view, which sees **the Tribulation → Christ returns → 1000-year reign → Final judgment**. This seems to be one of the most popular views amongst Americans. They believe a time of tribulation and apostasy will occur before Christ steps in, before the 1,000-year reign takes place. Pre-millennialists differ on when Christ returns. Some say at the end of the tribulation, and some say in the middle of the tribulation. No matter what the case, pre-millennialists believe that Christians will undergo suffering for a while before Christ steps into the picture.

If that isn't complicated enough, what about the dispensational view which sees that **Jesus returns and raptures believers → Those who come to Christ after rapture undergo tribulation → Jesus returns for the rest of the believers → 1,000-year reign → Final judgment.** Dispensationalists follow the same basic chronology as pre-millennialists, leading some people to describe dispensationalism as a subgroup of pre-millennialism. However, dispensationalists have a particular twist: they believe Christians will be taken up (raptured) before the tribulation starts. Only those left behind who come to Christ will endure the antichrist's hardships.

All these complications spring up around one word, "millennium", and the eschatological views, the views how the end will happen are described by this word "millennium". There is a-millennial, pre-millennial (and its sub-group dispensational) and post-millennial view, and if you are finding it hard to remember the niceties of each, don't bother, because none are in the Bible. The word millennium does not occur in the Greek Bible but the words "thousand years" do, and in the Latin version it occurs as "mille anni", two words, which we have transliterated as millennium. So what does it say about the mille anni, the thousand years?

*Rev 20:1 And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. Rev 20:2 And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him **a thousand years**, Rev 20:3 And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till **the thousand years** should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. Rev 20:4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ **a thousand years**. Rev 20:5 But the rest of the dead lived not again until **the thousand years** were finished. This is the first resurrection. Rev 20:6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the*

first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him ***a thousand years***.

There is a dragon, a key, a bottomless pit, headless souls reigning, the remainder of the dead not living, a picture which is not seen literally in the world. If you can turn the language of the book of Revelation from symbolism to a historic account, then you are in the noble company of all those mystics that have complicated the end time and made it so unfathomable. With so many different views, I would advise extreme caution in the interpretation of Revelation.

Paul simply says, *1Co 15:25 For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. 1Co 15:26 The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death*. Is Christ reigning, now at this time? Yes, of course He is or else He would not have been called a King, *Mat 2:2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him*…….*Luk 19:37 And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; Luk 19:38 Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest*.

Perhaps of greater interest is how Jesus reigns "*till he hath put all enemies under his feet*"? Bringing people into subjugation is generally by force. This is the rule of the dictator. If you think about it, the Lord could force everybody to comply with His will, and so I suppose, everyone would end up being saved. There is no need for sin and unrighteousness, and we would all walk around with blank faces, all doing the right thing, completely void of any expression of our individuality, our personality, just like automatons.

This is where we have to concede our view of absolute sovereignty and human responsibility, which are both true, both contradictory, and say that we don't really understand them, although some clever casuists say that they do. From the side of man's responsibility, he has a choice to serve or not to serve Jesus, *Jos 24:15And if it seem evil unto you to serve Jehovah,* ***choose*** *you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods whom your fathers that were on the other side of the river served, or the gods of the Amorite, in whose land ye dwell; but as* ***for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah***. Darby. So I take it that Jesus does not reign by coercion or by unnecessary force towards us but in love, the same as He did while upon earth. To reject that love has consequences.

The way that we are to serve is exactly that way that He served, *Mar 10:42 But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. Mar 10:43 But so shall it not be among you:*

but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: Mar 10:44 And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, ***shall be servant of all****. Mar 10:45 For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many*.

I do not see many religions doing this. They do not help the non-believer in his plight, they do not love them and they put the organisation, which many say that you have to belong to, ahead of Jesus.
It is a benign rule, that will culminate in the separation of the good and the bad, *Mat 13:30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn*.

Christ is all in all and it would do us well to note this, *1Co 15:27 For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. 1Co 15:28 And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.*

The outcomes of the resurrection lead us to the final consummation and that God may be all in all.

49. The Problem of the Resurrection of the Dead. Part 4

Preparatory reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 15 verses 1 – 58

The 4th point Paul makes in his examination of the resurrection of Jesus, is that the life of believers shows it. We will read, *1Co 15:26 The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. 1Co 15:27 For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. 1Co 15:28 And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all. 1Co 15:29 Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead? 1Co 15:30 And why stand we in jeopardy every hour*?

This scripture has a number of problems of interpretation as we shall see, and it may be that the Corinthians understood it better at the time than we do at this distance in time. There is an idea that Christians have to understand everything that is written, but this is to ask too much of us, especially looking at the culture

and belief of thousands of years ago. They must have presumably understood the subject of “baptism for the dead” but do we?

We do not know who or what is “*baptized for the dead*”, *1Co 15:29 Else* ***what shall they do which are baptized for the dead****, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?* The phrase “baptism for the dead” is so obscure and perplexing, the meaning so uncertain, and the variety of interpretations so numerous that it seems wise to say it is impossible to know what the phrase means. Given the difficulties, some wonder why we should even bother to investigate. But baptism for the dead is taught in Scripture and we should at least try to find out what it means. The Mormons place extraordinary importance on it, though not for the same reason Paul uses it to defend the coming resurrection of believers.

Mormon baptism for the dead is a proxy administration of baptism for a deceased person who didn’t hear the Mormon “gospel” while alive. Joseph Smith instituted the practice in 1840 in response to concern among his followers for forebears who died un-baptised. Today, these baptisms are also performed as an act of love for unrelated persons selected from genealogical records in Mormon archives.

> According to Mormon teaching, the practice affords the dead the opportunity to pursue salvation through a system of works righteousness. Mormons explicitly teach salvation by good works and baptism for the dead is part of that system. Like some Christians, Mormons wonder about the fate of those who died before the time of Christ. Whereas Christians wonder about those who miss the gospel of his atonement, Mormons fear missing his teachings on the way of righteous living.
>
> Further, Mormons claim Smith’s baptism for the dead restored a lost apostolic practice—something allegedly at the centre of Jesus’ post-resurrection teaching. According to Mormons, the gates of hell will not thwart the salvation of the dead for which this baptism is essential. “Worthy” Mormons with special temple privileges serve as proxies by undergoing baptism in a basin, patterned after the bronze sea of Solomon’s temple.
>
> The Mormon practice is antithetical to the gospel. The Gospels and Acts declare that Jesus’ post-resurrection teaching focused on his kingdom, the Old Testament witness to him, and the charge to make global disciples. If the Corinthians practiced what Mormons do, Paul couldn’t have tolerated it, since it contradicts the gospel.

Mormon baptism for the dead is part of a works based system of salvation. There are other beliefs which try to interpret this verse,

1. Some commentators assume this verse refers to the practice of giving newly baptized children the names of deceased non-Christian relatives, with the hope that the dead might somehow share in the Lord's mercy.
2. Another interpretation envisions the baptism of catechumens (a person who is receiving instruction in preparation for Christian baptism or confirmation.)who have witnessed the persecution and martyrdom of their Christian predecessors. With their belief that the dead do rise, the Christian candidates come forward boldly and accept both the faith and its consequences.
3. A related view holds that the group consists of those baptised in connection with a dead Christian loved one. In the first century, many families were split religiously, as only one or two members may have converted to Christianity. When it came time for these new Christians to die, they no doubt exhorted their non-Christian family members to consider the Christian faith and to embrace it so that they could be together in the next world. After the deaths of their Christian loved ones, many family members no doubt *did* investigate the Christian faith and were baptized so that they could be reunited with their loved ones in the afterlife.
4. Others advance the possibility that Paul was referring to the practice of a heretical cult that existed in Corinth. On this theory, Paul was not endorsing the practice of the group, but merely citing it to emphasize the importance of the resurrection. Rather, his point was: If even heterodox Christians have a practice that makes no sense if there is no resurrection of the dead, how much more, then, should we orthodox Catholics believe in and hope for the resurrection of the dead.

Baptism takes place among the living not among the dead, and it is a personal repentance that precedes it, and without repentance there is no salvation. It does one no good whatsoever, if he is baptized and has not truly repented of his sins, *Act 19:4 Then said Paul,* ***John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him****, that is, on Christ Jesus. Act 19:5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus*. Baptising by proxy, for people who have died, is a waste of time, because the dead cannot repent, *Pro 11:7 At the death of a wicked person, hope vanishes. Moreover, his confidence in strength vanishes*. GW. Also, baptism is a testimony to God*, 1Pe 3:21 Those flood waters were like baptism that now saves you. But baptism is more than just washing your body. It means turning to God with a clear conscience, because Jesus Christ was raised from death*. CEV. I am not sure the dead can do any of this!

It seems strange to me that Paul, when talking about “baptism on behalf (ὑπέρ) of the dead”, is trying to make his point by using a non-Christian idea, *1Co 15:29 Else* ***what shall they do which are baptized for the dead****, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?* It’s not a very convincing Christian argument if you have to go to an example from unbelievers, to prove your point. So I reject any idea of this being a non-Christian practice. What is Paul possibly getting at?

Baptism or washing is a symbolic act of cleansing, relating to being forgiven of the past ways and past sins. It is like a burial of the old life, the old man, the death of us and resurrection in Christ, and this is what I think the apostle is saying, *Rom 6:3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Rom 6:4* ***Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death****: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. Rom 6:5 For* ***if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection****: Rom 6:6 Knowing this, that* ***our old man*** *is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. Rom 6:7 For he that is dead is freed from sin*.

The epistles to the **Romans** and to the **Corinthians** were written at about the same time, and the letter to the Romans says the same as to the Corinthians, in respect to baptism for the dead,

a. *1Co 15:29 Else* ***what shall they do which are baptized for the dead****, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?*
b. *Rom 6:4* ***Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death****: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

Book	Date (A.D.)	Book	Date (A.D.)
James	45–49	Philippians, Philemon	63
Galatians	49	1 Peter	63–64
1 & 2 Thessalonians	51	1 Timothy	63–66
Mark	50s or 60s	Titus	63–66
Matthew	50s or 60s	Hebrews	64–68
1 Corinthians	55	2 Peter	66
2 Corinthians	56	2 Timothy	67
Romans	57–58	Jude	68–80
Luke	60	John	85–90
Acts	61	1, 2, 3 John	85–90
Colossians, Ephesians	61	Revelation	90–95

I think that Paul is saying, “if we get baptised and Christ did not come back from the dead, why are we baptised for a dead Christ?” He goes on, *1Co 15:30 And why stand we in jeopardy every hour?* Or *1Co 15:30 Why do *we* also endanger ourselves every hour?* Darby. Why, because we preach Christ, do we put ourselves in danger, when there is no need? It is a very logical answer and it is Christ centred and does no violation to the text or doctrine.

As far as I am concerned, says Paul, if all that I have done, all the persecution that I have suffered for Christ, it is like a gladiator fighting wild animals, it is

worth nothing if the dead are not brought back to life, *1Co 15:31 Brothers and sisters, I swear to you on my pride in you which Christ Jesus our Lord has given me: I face death every day. 1Co 15:32 If I have fought with wild animals in Ephesus, what have I gained according to the way people look at things? If the dead are not brought back to life, "Let's eat and drink because tomorrow we're going to die!"* GW.

But that's not the way to think, that is the world view of the unregenerate man, the defeatist, the fool, the man who has "said in his heart there is no God", *1Co 15:33 Don't let anyone deceive you. Associating with bad people will ruin decent people. 1Co 15:34 Come back to the right point of view, and stop sinning. Some people don't know anything about God. You should be ashamed of yourselves*. GW.

"The point Paul makes here is pertinent to all people in all ages. When we associate with or take delight in the company of people with worldly morals, we run the risk of mimicking their behaviours, their language, and their habits. Before long we are no longer of Christ, but of the world with its denial of absolute authority, its rejection of the Bible as the Word of God, and its ideology of relative morality. This is especially pertinent to young people who are generally easily influenced by their peers. Young people are desperate for the approval of others. So motivated are they by the need for acceptance that Godly wisdom in decision-making can go out the window in the face of peer pressure. Therefore, it is crucial for parents of young teens especially to be on guard against the influence of bad company."

"Evil communications" refer to any kind of associations, relationships, communion, conversation, companions and fellowship that is evil, bad, wrong, or harmful by the standard of God's Word. "Communications" is the Greek homilia, which refers to any form of association, companying together, companionship, conversation. It is from homileo, meaning "a multitude, a crowd, a company." This is where the word homily comes from, the multitude of people becoming the purpose for which they gathered, to listen to a homily or sermon. It is translated "talked together" (Lu. 24:14) and "communed together" (Lu. 24:15). "Corrupt" is phtheiro, "to waste, destroy, bring to a worse state, spoil, subvert" (Complete Word Study Bible). It is translated "defile" and "destroy" (1 Co. 3:17). It is used for the corruption of the mind by false doctrine (2 Co. 11:3). "Good manners" is chrestos (profitable, fit, good for any use) and ethos (custom, habit, morals, character). It refers to the right or biblical way of living and thinking."

"1 Corinthians 15:33 is a command to separate from all evil associations, and it doesn't matter whether they are your close acquaintances or family. Just because you know them, just because you have a soft spot for them, doesn't mean you can ignore this verse. It describes a very strict way of Christian living. It is a warning that any association or company or companionship or communion

with any form of evil spoils the right and biblical way of Christian living and thinking. This verse is a command to have a testing mindset. It is a command to judge everything by the standard of whether or not it is an evil communication/association and to avoid everything that fits that standard. This is contrary to the "judge not, be tolerant, lighten up, don't be so strict" thinking that is predominant within 21st century Christianity."

1Co 15:34 Come back to the right point of view, and stop sinning. Some people don't know anything about God. You should be ashamed of yourselves. GW. I let Dr Gill finish this point,

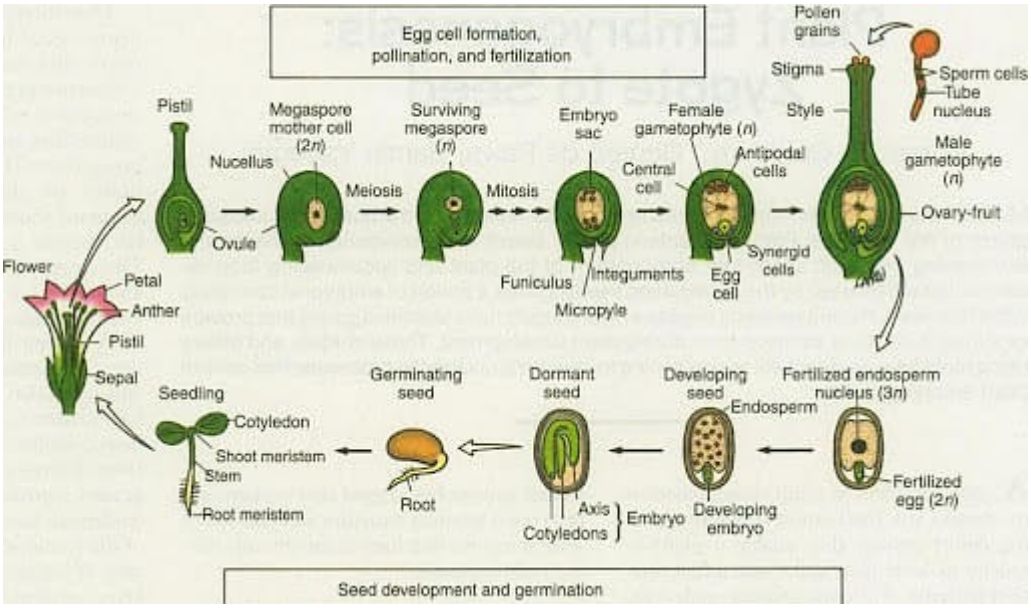
> **for some have not the knowledge of God**; are like the Gentiles that are without God, and know him not; they know not, or, at least, do not own the truth of God in his word, declaring and testifying the doctrine of the resurrection; they err in that point, not knowing the Scriptures, the sense of them, and this truth contained in them; nor the power or God in raising the dead, nor the justice of God, which makes it necessary that the dead should be raised:
>
> **I speak this to your shame**; that there should be such ignorant persons in their community; that there were any of such bad principles as to deny the resurrection of the dead, and of such dissolute lives as to give up themselves to sensual lusts and pleasures: that such were continued in the church, kept company with, indulged and caressed; and that there was so great a corruption in doctrine, discipline, and conversation, among them.

50. The Problem of the Resurrection of the Dead. Part 5

Preparatory reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 15 verses 1 – 58

What does the resurrection body, our bodies, look like, *1Co 15:35 Some of you have asked, "How will the dead be raised to life? What kind of bodies will they have?"* CEV. There was some doubt or questions about the resurrection body, it was a subject of discussion and most of all how will we be raised to life? I wonder if this discussion had been going round the fellowships of disciples, right from the time Jesus rose from the dead. The body that Jesus came back in was not always recognisable, though after a while it was recognisable, and it had properties that allowed it to pass through matter, and yet it also could retain matter such as food. It was indeed a perplexing matter.

Paul says that we are looking at the subject incorrectly, *1Co 15:36 These are stupid questions. When you plant something, it must die in the ground before it can live and grow. 1Co 15:37 And when you plant something, what you plant does not have the same "body" that it will have later. What you plant is only a seed, maybe wheat or something else. 1Co 15:38 But God gives it the body that he has planned for it, and he gives each kind of seed its own body*. ERV.



A seed does not look like the new plant that grows from it, the seed does not grow into a bigger seed. Can you easily tell from the seed, the size, shape and weight of the new plant? The body which is sown in the ground does not bear any resemblance to the new plant that grows from it. In the autumn when you are collecting seeds for next year's planting, have a look at the variety, and see if you can tell what plants they will become. Paul would have been amazed at the development of a seed knowing what we know today.

Every seed contains the germ of next year's seed in it. It is like the chicken and the egg, which came first? *Gen 1:29 And God said: Behold I have given you every herb bearing seed upon the earth, and all trees that have in themselves seed of their own kind, to be your meat*: DRB. The seed has to go through certain growth phases. There are the 5 stages of plant life cycle, the seed, germination, growth, reproduction, pollination, and seed spreading stages. It has built into it the necessary phases that will result in a new plant, and a large part of this occurs in the darkness of the ground. How did the seed "know" it would need to develop this way? The answer is that it did not, but the Creator did, and the purpose of this life extends to the next life, and we have the necessary system that will result in life at the next level.

To use another analogy from nature, it is like the caterpillar that is born of an egg, yet it undergoes a miraculous transformation, a metamorphosis, whereby it weaves its own coffin around itself and dissolves into a "soup" from which it is reconstituted and arises from a death like state as a butterfly. The thing that was changed from a caterpillar to a butterfly is connected in part by the process of transformation, and that which has a new life at one time had the old life. The

seed sown is undoubtedly connected with the new body, it is linked to it, it does not form separately from the corpse, which like a seed is caste in the ground.

We return to the dust from which we were created, *Gen 3:19 In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,* ***till thou return unto the ground;*** *for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return*, But the spirit which God breathed into us returns to God, *Ecc 12:7 Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and* ***the spirit shall return unto God who gave it***.

> "Truly it is never a pleasant sound, that rattle of the clay upon the coffin-lid, 'Earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes,' nor to the farmer, for its own sake, would it be a very pleasant thing to put his grain into the dull cold earth; yet I trow no farmer ever weeps when he sows his seed." (Spurgeon)

The statement that "***the spirit shall return unto God who gave it***" shows the continuity of life, because the spirit is alive although the body is dead, *Heb 9:27 We die only once, and then we are judged*. CEV. If we are dead, then what is the part of us which goes through judgement? It is the spirit of the man, *Rev 20:12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is that of life. And the dead were judged out of the things written in the books according to their works. Rev 20:13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged each according to their works*: Darby.

There is not, as far as we are concerned, any time between death and judgment. There is no soul sleep, although a person appears to be asleep in death, but all the while decomposing. I do not see that a decomposing body tells us anything about the afterlife, and the material substance of the body is worthless to us for we are no longer flesh but spirit, *Dan 12:2 And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt*. The nature of "time" is apparently different between the natural world and the spiritual world, *Rev 10:6 And he swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven and the things which are therein, and the earth and the things which are in it, and the sea and the things which are therein: That time shall be no longer*. DRB. What replaces "time", I have no idea.

Well, how does the second coming fit in with this, *1Th 4:14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so* ***them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him****. 1Th 4:15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. 1Th 4:16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and* ***the dead in Christ shall rise first****: 1Th 4:17 Then we which are alive and remain*

shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. That seems to say that Jesus brings the dead in Christ with Him while at the same time raising them from the dead. I leave you to work that one out.

Paul continues*, 1Co 15:39 All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds. 1Co 15:40 There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. 1Co 15:41 There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory*.

This is explained as follows, as Albert Barnes tells us,

> Look upon the heavens, and see the splendour of the sun, the moon, and the stars. And then look upon the earth, and see the bodies there - the bodies of people, and brutes, and insects. You see here two entire classes of bodies. You see how they differ. Can it be deemed strange if there should be a difference between our bodies when on earth and when in heaven? Do we not, in fact, see a vast difference between what strikes our eye here on earth and in the sky? And why should we deem it strange that between bodies adapted to live here and bodies adapted to live in heaven, there should be a difference, like that which is seen between the objects which appear on earth and those which appear in the sky?" The argument is a popular one; but it is striking, and meets the object which he has in view.
>
> The glory of the celestial is one - The splendour, beauty, dignity, magnificence of the heavenly bodies differs much from those on earth. That is one thing; the beauty of earthly objects is another and a different thing. Beautiful as may be the human frame; beautiful as may be the plumage of birds; beautiful as may be the flower, the fossil, the mineral, the topaz, or the diamond; yet they differ from the heavenly bodies, and are not to be compared with them. Why should we deem it strange that there may be a similar difference between the body as adapted to its residence here and as adapted to its residence in heaven?

The glorious bodies in the heavens soon began to entice man, and man was tempted by the things he saw to make an image of God, but it is not possible and it is forbidden. The idea though is that God is glimpsed in the things that He has made, *Rom 1:19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. Rom 1:20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without*

excuse: These verses in Corinthians perhaps contain a warning, that while the celestial bodies are more glorious, we should take care that we do not worship them.

The words of Paul in Corinthians are almost taken, verbatim from Deuteronomy*, Deu 4:15 Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the LORD spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire: Deu 4:16 Lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female, Deu 4:17 The likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flieth in the air, Deu 4:18* ***The likeness of anything that creepeth on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the waters beneath the earth: Deu 4:19 And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heave****n, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the LORD thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven. Deu 4:20 But the LORD hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto him a people of inheritance, as ye are this day.*

So what does Paul conclude about the resurrection of the dead believers, *1Co 15:42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: 1Co 15:43 It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: 1Co 15:44 It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. 1Co 15:45 And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit*.

The form that we shall take is one which shall surpass this form in many ways. It shall be a body that is raised incorruptible, glorious, and powerful, something we do not spend much time in thinking about. We look at this decaying, dishonourable, weakness of our bodies, and as the years mount and we get weaker and this system becomes terminal, we become lesser people. We look back upon the former years when we were strong and we bemoan the aging flesh, *Ecc 12:1 Keep your Creator in mind while you are young! In years to come, you will be burdened down with troubles and say, "I don't enjoy life anymore."* CEV.

Paul is trying to get us to see that the end of the book of this life, is not a tragedy, is not a hopeless tale ending in depression, failure and the dark graveside of hopelessness, but that there is another volume to our lives, more glorious than this one, *1Co 2:9 But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. 1Co 2:10* ***But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit****: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.*

We are like the man Bunyan describes in Pilgrims Progress, “the man with the muck rake”,

> ……..the Interpreter takes them apart again, and has them first into a room where was a man that could look no way but downwards, with a muck-rake in his hand. There stood also one over his head with a celestial crown in his hand, and proffered him that crown for his muck-rake; but the man did neither look up nor regard, but raked to himself the straws, the small sticks, and dust of the floor.
>
> Then said Christiana, I persuade myself that I know somewhat the meaning of this; for this is a figure of a man of this world: is it not, good sir?
> INTERPRETER: Thou hast said right, said he; and his muck-rake doth show his carnal mind. And whereas thou seest him rather give heed to rake up straws and sticks, and the dust of the floor, than to do what He says that calls to him from above with the celestial crown in his hand; it is to show, that heaven is but as a fable to some, and that things here are counted the only things substantial. Now, whereas it was also showed thee that the man could look no way but downwards, it is to let thee know that earthly things, when they are with power upon men’s minds, quite carry their hearts away from God.

With all of the promises, with all of the glory set in our future, why do we look on this life as amounting to anything, why do we mourn and weep for the things of this world? It is because as blessed Bunyan wrote, “**his muck-rake doth show his carnal mind**”. We are carnal, if we do the same things. Our eyes are not open to the heavenly glory and we are lost. As Spurgeon said, “**I trow no farmer ever weeps when he sows his seed**.” He doesn’t weep because the seed is the bearer of life and he looks forward to the new life, the life with Christ. That is the acid test of the believer, “do you want to go and be with Christ, now?” If you do not, why would you ever want to be with Him?

So Paul summarises, *1Co 15:46 Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. 1Co 15:47 The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. 1Co 15:48 As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. 1Co 15:49 And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly*.

51. The Problem of the Resurrection of the Dead. Part 6

Preparatory reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 15 verses 1 – 58

I was a “dispensationalist” long before I became a Christian. This was all down to a book that I had read called “The Late Great Planet Earth” by Hal Lindsey. The book tells of the events that will occur as we approach the end of the world, and it gives Scripture to support its view, although I began to question how these Scriptures were used. I was not familiar with Scripture at the time being an unbeliever, so I just took in the sensationalism, and what was said without much question. I was carnal, worldly and did not have the slightest jot of spirituality in me.

As a taste of this book, I quote this,

> According to Lindsey, when the mysterious Rapture occurs, society will be virtually panic-stricken. He describes the scene as follows:
> *“*There I was, driving down the freeway and all of a sudden the place went crazy . . . cars going in all directions . . . and not one of them had a driver. I mean it was wild! I think we’ve got an invasion from outer space*!” (1970, 125).*

Lindsey’s explanation for this wild scene, which has been drawn from his fertile imagination, is that these automobiles were manned by Christians, who were suddenly and mysteriously swept up to be with the invisible Christ. This is certainly easy reading (it sold over 15 million copies) and this is in part why it is so easily absorbed in the mind.

Lindsey’s book had a view of the end times which is generally known as “dispensationalism” and is related to “pre-millennialism”. The idea of a millennium figures in this system of teaching, and as we have seen, this is a very tenuous doctrine upon which to build a system of belief. According to dispensational pre-millennialism, **the rapture** and **the first resurrection** are not the same thing. Dispensationalism teaches that the rapture will take place prior to the start of **the seven year tribulation** and will involve "Christians who have died since the church began at Pentecost" (Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2006), p. 198). And as for the first resurrection, it "will take place prior to the start of **the millennial kingdom**" (p. 96) and will involve "Old Testament saints and the saints who perished in the tribulation".

That is a lot to swallow if you have not gone into the subject at much depth. There are some terms which you will want some explanation of, **the rapture, the first resurrection, the seven year tribulation and the millennial kingdom**. I don’t intend to go into the terms now and it’s up to you to find out for yourself what they might mean. The sequence of events that the dispensationalists put forward, which defines their view of the “last times” is,

1. The rapture of the church
2. The judgment seat of Christ
3. The seven-year tribulation
4. The second coming of Christ to the earth
    - The judgment of the living Gentiles
    - The judgment of Israel
    - The resurrection and rewarding of Old Testament saints and the saints who perished in the tribulation
    - The binding of Satan (Rev. 20:1-3)
    - The actual establishing of the messianic kingdom
5. The millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ
6. The judgments of the end times
    - Final judgment of Satan and the fallen angels
    - Unbelievers will be judged at the great white throne judgment
    - Judgment of the heavens and the earth
7. The eternal state

You will find that many of the cults, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Christadelphians along with many orthodox believers, hold these or similar views. Dispensationalism is an infection caused by an over active imagination and a lack of Scripture.

If you think that Dispenationalism is complicated, you are right, but is it Scriptural. I swallowed the teaching, but I had two things wrong with me. I was not "born again", I was the natural man, *1Co 2:14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*. I did not know the Scriptures. I was at a big disadvantage when it came to knowing what the truth was. This article by Bryan Wolfmueller is certainly worth a read and I have given the URL should you wish to read the full article, https://wolfmueller.co/dispensationalism/

> **The secret rapture of the church**. Dispensationalists teach the "pre-tribulation rapture of the church". This means that the church will be taken out of this earth before (pre) the seven year "Great Tribulation" which culminates with the battle of Armageddon and the end of this dispensation. In Dispensationalism the rapture is an auxiliary doctrine which serves the distinction between Israel and the church by removing the church so God can finish His dealing with Israel, much like a mother telling her child, "Clear your toys off the table, it's time for dinner." The fantastic and fanciful ideas concerning the sudden disappearance of all born-again Christians continues to spawn "Christian" science fiction like the Left Behind books and movies. But

these machinations are completely disconnected from the Biblical text. “Rather than science-fiction mumbo-jumbo, the Bible teaches that the Rapture is not a unique event, but part of the resurrection of the dead… The “rapture” is the mechanism by which Jesus gives the resurrection body to those who are alive at the time of His return. The rapture is the ‘mystery’ of the resurrection of the living.”

The distinction between Israel and the Church creates a romantic view of the false religion and idolatry of modern Judaism. On a whim a few years ago I went to the local, ‘non-denominational’, dispensational mega-church and did a survey of the folks walking around, asking this question, “If you could only be Jewish or Roman Catholic, which would you be?” The overwhelming majority said, “Jewish”. This survey is perhaps ill-conceived; it is certainly telling. One response stands out. I asked a group standing together my question. The woman responded first, saying, “Oh, Catholic.”

“What?” the others around her responded. “I’d rather be Jewish.” This was the consensus of the group. “Why?” she asked. “At least the Catholics believe in Jesus.” I thought this was a good point. “But you see, when Jesus comes back the Jews will recognize Him as the Messiah. They’ll believe and be saved.” “Oh, that’s right,” she conceded, “put me down as Jewish.”

This incident, while neither scientific nor scholarly, does demonstrate a number of dangerous side-effects of the Israel/Church distinction. There is a romantic notion of Judaism; a preference of the shofar (trumpet) over the church bells. American Evangelicals who despise or neglect the Lord’s Supper are zealous to celebrate the passover! Here Elijah’s empty seat gives a powerful testimony to their empty sacraments and hollow ecclesiology. Even more, the visible coming of Jesus is seen as a means of grace. “They will see Him and believe.” Jesus’ words to us, “Blessed are you who have not seen, and yet believe” are turned on their head; salvation becomes a matter of sight, not faith. Thus “this separation between the Kingdom and the Church, which is as unscriptural as it is dangerous, leads to one of the most serious errors of dispensationalism, the tendency to minimize the importance of the present Gospel age in the interest of the Kingdom age that is to come.”

Paul’s story about the end time is much simpler than the Dispensationalist, *1Co 15:50 My friends, I want you to know that our bodies of flesh and blood will decay. This means that they cannot share in God's kingdom, which lasts forever. 1Co 15:51 I will explain a mystery to you. Not every one of us will die, but we will all be changed. 1Co 15:52 It will happen suddenly, quicker than the*

blink of an eye. At the sound of the last trumpet the dead will be raised. We will all be changed, so that we will never die again. CEV.

The mystery, does not remain a mystery, because it is explained, *"I will explain a mystery to you. Not every one of us will die, but we will all be changed. It will happen suddenly, quicker than the blink of an eye. At the sound of the last trumpet the dead will be raised. We will all be changed*".

It all happens very quickly, so fast that between the blink of an eye, it has happened. The word translate suddenly is ἄτομος, meaning "un-cuttable" or "indivisible." It is where we get the word atom from, and in time past it was thought to be the smallest part of matter, which you could divide no further. Atom was referred to time as well, meaning I suppose that it happened so quickly that you could not measure the time, it was so small.

In this sudden coming, there was no time for anything else, certainly not the comings and goings of the Dispensationalists, the time to erect a Jewish Temple, the time for a 1,000 year reign. The twinkling eye saw this life at one moment and the new life in another moment, in the blink of an eye. We shall be raised incorruptible never to be corrupted again. It was not complicated by comings and goings of which the Bible knows nothing, but it was simple and sudden.

Now at this point some are mumbling about the poor unbeliever, given no chance, *Mat 24:38 For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, Mat 24:39 And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be*. Why are we so concerned about the unbeliever? God isn't. He has had his chance to repent and he has turned the Saviour down, so why are you concerned? Are you feeling guilty that you did not tell him what was to come?

The rich man in the story of Lazarus had no one to tell him of his fate, *Luk 16:27 Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: Luk 16:28 For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Luk 16:29 Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them*. They have the Scripture just as you and I have the Scripture, and you do not have to go to the place of torment.

Paul continues, *1Co 15:53 Our dead and decaying bodies will be changed into bodies that won't die or decay. 1Co 15:54 The bodies we now have are weak and can die. But they will be changed into bodies that are eternal. Then the Scriptures will come true, "Death has lost the battle*! CEV. It is not something which should worry the believer in fact he should welcome it. There is no

scaremongering that the cults thrive upon, because they are dealing with the carnal man. It is de facto, the end and farewell to planet earth.

This concern with the comings and goings which complicate people's vision of the end times shows a number of things. It is a distraction and smokescreen to take your eyes off of looking for Jesus. If you espouse these views you will have your back turned to the main event, the coming of the Lord. It is a carnal view of the end, which sees a Jewish Temple and return to the sacrifices, but note, *Act 15:10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? Act 15:11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they*. They could not bear the Law, so why implement it anew, *Gal 2:18 For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. Gal 2:19 For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God*.

Unfortunately, sensationalism gets hearers and the truth is too boring for these idle minds which grasp at any new speculation that comes along. Paul therefore closes the chapter with a hymn of triumph, *1Co 15:55 O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? 1Co 15:56 The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. 1Co 15:57 But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*. That sums up Christ's victory. It's not just that He overcame death, He killed death and He overcame the devil who held men in fear of death, and that is what counts.

The resurrection is a reason for hope and so we go on, *1Co 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord*.

52..... The Problem of Collecting for the Saints

Preparatory reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 16 verses 1 – 4

1Co 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. 1Co 16:2 Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. 1Co 16:3 And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem. 1Co 16:4 And if it be meet that I go also, they shall go with me.

This injunction to "collect" is one which has a resonance among us contemporary Christians today. If we had not been told to do it, to collect, we would quite happily have conducted our selfish lives oblivious to the poorer brethren. In fact, we seldom give spontaneously, unless there is a "chugger" collecting in the street, or unless there is some disaster that jogs our conscience. Sometimes, we

give a bit of cash to help poor people in Africa, and that one off donation does for us, and fills all the requirements to be a “cheerful giver”. It is not much removed from Judas who was a thief and held the bag of money. We keep our hands tight on it once we have it.

We proffer our excuses to God, saying that it is hard to give especially when we don’t know if the money will get there, and besides, who needs our help? A little boy was sat at the dinner table, refusing to eat his meal. The mother looked at him and said, “There are plenty of starving children in Africa who would love to have your food”. The petulant child responded to his mother, “Name me one”. That is our attitude, we don’t know them, we pretend to care, and we don’t give to them. I imagine that the people of Corinth, nearly 800 miles and half a world away from Jerusalem, had these thoughts. The people at Jerusalem were a culture and a distant memory from their lives.

Giving is hard and it is often said that the last part of a man to be converted is his wallet, and personal meanness is a disease from which many do not recover or they develop strategies to deceive themselves into thinking that they are getting better and giving. Giving to the poor is like people giving to charity shops. All your old junk, when you have no use for it, is good for someone else. You think that your old clothes, rags, and garbage would be appreciated in Africa, so they get bundled up, transported, and end up as waste on someone else’s doorstep, or beach, or rubbish tip. We had not even enquired if they needed our rubbish, or what it was that they needed, if anything. What do they need, could it be food, medicine, education, Bibles?

The western world has developed many charities, so that we do not have to get our hands dirty or take up our precious thought time on this subject. We can at a keystroke, button push, or card swipe salve our consciences by giving something to the faceless recipient, in some faraway place. We can give clinically and often thoughtlessly, to some need. Of course these big charitable organisations are a necessary evil, if you do not want to become involved with people. It is like the “Open Doors” charity, which marks the names of people in its stories of help with an “*” before their name, that means “names changed for security reasons, like “Pastor Hari*, who is under constant surveillance”.

> He has been arrested twice and had his church closed down, ”We now gather in secret” he says, we do take precautions, but I am confident that even if they kill me for my faith, I want to continue to serve the Lord”. Our prayers are with you, Pastor Hari*

…….or whatever your name is? Imagine typing this on an envelope, “to the unknown Christian”. Who would it get them? Whilst giving should be done without ostentation, in secret, it does not mean that it is undirected, or that you

do not contact the recipient. From the invisible Christian a gift to the invisible Christian in India, what madness.

The organisations that take the pain out of giving, like the “Samaritans Purse”, which sponsors “Operation Christmas Child” and gives a shoe box of gifts, except of course “religious or political literature”. The CEO is Franklin Graham, who in addition to the more than $620,000 he receives for his other full-time job, leads Samaritan’s Purse, an international relief agency based in Boone, USA. His 2013 compensation from Samaritan’s Purse alone made him the highest-paid CEO of any international relief agency based in the U.S., according to data provided by GuideStar, the world’s largest source of information on non-profit organizations.

In case you think that eye watering salary is too much for a Christian, there is £88,000 for the CEO of Christians against poverty, £132,000 for the CEO of Christian Aid, £100,000 for the CEO of World Vision and so it goes on, making the widows mite seem as the dust of the balance. And of course there is a team of well paid people backing these CEO’s up. Wait a minute, if you have all of these people to pay, your donation to charity will be a widows mite! By the way, the equivalent rank at the Salvation Army gets a mere £22,668 making it the charity of choice with the lowest overhead on salaries.

Between the highly obscene salaries of the “we’ll help you to give” organisations, and the pathetically mean Christians, some of whom love the fact that the tithe is no more, so that they can give even less, lies the genuine need of a fellow believer. No, it’s not money for the pastor who cannot hold down a job and preach, the money is not for that. It’s not for the building that you only use once or twice a week, that you call church, a money pit, when you already have a house. It’s for the saints. God is watching you to see HOW you give, *Mar 12:41 And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. Mar 12:42 And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing*.

“*Now concerning the collection for the saints”* says Paul. The saints? Who are these then, dead people elevated through a good life to the rank of saint? No, they are the Christians in the church who have need and who Paul reminds you of. They should not be spoken of as old people who are useless, widows who draw off of the equally poor, children, people who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own, pew fodder that we have to tolerate in the church. They are important to God, they are saints, holy ones and we should not forget that, *Pro 14:31 He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor*. To help you give to the worthy people, God has called them saints.

It says nothing about giving to the unbeliever here because it is a collection for the saints. But this does not mean that we are uncharitable to the unbeliever, *Deu 15:7 If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: Deu 15:8 But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. Deu 15:9 Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee. Deu 15:10Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto. Deu 15:11 For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying,* ***Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land***.

"Give something, however small, to the one in need. For it is not small to one who has nothing. Neither is it small to God, if we have given what we could." So said Gregory Nazianzen. This is a particular offering for the saints, and we have no idea what it was for except that it was sent to Jerusalem along with the contribution from the Galatians. There had been a famine in Judea which I calculate, occurred some 8 years before Paul asks for a collection. Perhaps the famine was still continuing and they then sent the money to a central collection point in Jerusalem? What compelled Paul to raise funds among his gentile converts for the poor in Jerusalem? Why did he feel this money would be better spent on the poor in Jerusalem rather than on the poor gentiles in the surrounding communities where he collected it? What did he hope this offering would accomplish?

I think it was to show that church was not split, as it is today, with denominations drawing a boundary between believers. Heaven would embrace all Christians, those from Corinth as well as those from Jerusalem, and those in Bracknell or wherever you live. If heaven embraces us we should embrace one another, and if your brother or sister has a need, then we are to meet it. After all, the things we possess are not ours but loaned to us by God's providence and when our time is over, we shall hand it all back to the owner, and account for it, *Rom 14:12 So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God*.

Was this a one off gift or a gift every week until the necessity had passed? A one off or perpetual gift? The apostle Paul was going to take their gift with him, *"when I come*", so I imagine that the gift had accrued over time, and the individuals in the church were responsible for making sure their contribution arrived at wherever it was to be collected, and sent off to its destination. It didn't involve any charities, taking a cut off of the top, only an honest courier. The

collection was as often as necessitated by circumstance and there were no end of charitable causes that needed support and the poor “gentiles” would not be discarded in favour of Jerusalem.

Giving requires a discipline, as much I would say, as prayer, or time given to studying the word. It needs thinking about, meditating upon, asking the Lord for an opportunity to give to those things that He wants and to advance the kingdom. We should pray that Jesus will make “me” the sort of person who can say, *Pro 22:9 He who has a good eye, he is blessed, for he gives of his bread to the poor.* We should examine the reasons why we are not charitable and ask the Lord to correct this in us and make us recognise that we are doing it to Him, *Mat 25:40 The king will answer, "Whenever you did it for any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me." Mat 25:41 Then the king will say to those on his left, "Get away from me! You are under God's curse. Go into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels! Mat 25:42 I was hungry, but you did not give me anything to eat, and I was thirsty, but you did not give me anything to drink. Mat 25:43 I was a stranger, but you did not welcome me, and I was naked, but you did not give me any clothes to wear. I was sick and in jail, but you did not take care of me." Mat 25:44 Then the people will ask, "Lord, when did we fail to help you when you were hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in jail?" Mat 25:45 The king will say to them, "Whenever you failed to help any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you failed to do it for me." Mat 25:46 Then Jesus said, "Those people will be punished forever. But the ones who pleased God will have eternal life."*

No, we didn’t build monumental churches to show how much we loved our religion and God, we did not build colleges of Christian education to show how much we loved learning about Jesus, we didn’t set our faith upon miracles and prophesy, *Mat 7:22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? Mat 7:23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity*. It was set upon the helping of the genuine poor that Jesus has left in the land, God’s poor, who He has left for our charity, *Deu 15:11 For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land*.

While we are sorting out our attitudes to giving and who we are to give to, I remind you of Paul’s words, *1Co 16:2 On the first day of the week, let every one of you put apart with himself, laying up what it shall well please him: that when I come, the collections be not then to be made.* DRB. Put aside something each week, and don’t say you didn’t get any direction in which to give so there is no reason to collect. Get a jar and accumulate it until you do. Did the Lord prosper you in the previous week, did you have more than enough food, were you not blessed of the Almighty, is there excess money in your purse? The first step is to

see whether you will give, is to get a jar and a jar will remind you of this, and over time you can get a bigger jar. And remember it is not your money anyway.

Paul does not want to be a burden on other churches, and he shows it, *2Th 3:7 You surely know that you should follow our example. We didn't waste our time loafing, 2Th 3:8 and we didn't accept food from anyone without paying for it. We didn't want to be a burden to any of you, so night and day we worked as hard as we could. 2Th 3:9 We had the right not to work, but we wanted to set an example for you. 2Th 3:10 We also gave you the rule that* ***if you don't work, you don't eat***. If a man was capable of working and did not work, then he was not a charity case.

Collections for the poor are not without their rules, and sitting around all day, when you can earn a crust is not regarded as grounds for giving.

53..... Problem Preachers

Preparatory reading: 1 Corinthians Chapter 6 and 1 Timothy Chapter 3.

We have just completed a brief look at the Corinthian problems, and there were many of them. You might think that today's preachers would adopt Paul's rhetoric and exhort the people with as much fervour, considering the time is short, instead of tickling their ears with teachings that often profit little, and ask you to do absolutely nothing about your lives. Not Paul, for he is concerned that the people he speaks to get into the kingdom of God, and to that end he preaches appropriately. The sins that beset us around and about, are the same sins that brought Israel to its knees.

1Co 6:9 Know ye not that ***the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God****? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, 1Co 6:10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. 1Co 6:11 And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.*

But we are so above these sins aren't we? We do not need any teaching about such things, they are beneath us. Those sins were dealt with by Christ, and we re-enforce the message by an idle song, "Jesus has washed my sins away",

Happy day, happy day,
When Jesus washed my sins away!
He taught me how to watch and pray,
And live rejoicing every day;

Happy day, happy day,
When Jesus washed my sins away!

Well, if your sins are washed away, why does the apostle Paul keep going on about these sins of the flesh, which translate into sins of the spirit, the spiritual nature of the life to come. Certainly, many who name Christ are mired in these sins of the flesh and will not be getting into the kingdom. If it was dealt with on conversion, then why is Paul still dealing with it? Well, what is your answer? Look at your life and tell me you do not sin. *1Jn 1:8 If we say, "We aren't sinful" we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 1Jn 1:9 God is faithful and reliable. If we confess our sins, he forgives them and cleanses us from everything we've done wrong*. GW. So you are a sinner, but are you still confessing your sin?

We make it so easy to enter the kingdom, on our terms of course that most people would think that they had been cured of all these sins. Take adultery, for instance. It is very high among the churches, and for a good reason, the subject is rarely spoken of and it is no surprise seeing as the pastors are up to their armpits in it, along with the congregations, as these statistics show,

- Around 35% of church members have engaged in some form of extramarital affair.
- 42% of Protestant pastors have counseled couples dealing with adultery.
- Adultery is cited as the reason for divorce in roughly 20-27% of cases within the church.
- Approximately 30% of church attendees have experienced emotional or sexual infidelity in their own marriage.
- 55% of divorces in the United States involve adultery as a contributing factor.
- Adultery rates are higher among those who attend church less frequently.
- The rate of infidelity has been steadily increasing over the past two decades among churchgoers.
- 45% of Christian marriages end in divorce.
- Over 70% of individuals who cheat at church eventually confess their infidelity to their partner.
- 60% of clergy who experience infidelity in their marriage remain married.
- Adulterous behavior is more prevalent among younger church members compared to older generations.
- 56% of Christians believe that adultery is morally wrong.
- The divorce rate among evangelical Christians is slightly higher than the national average.

Among pastors,

- 20% of pastors admit to having engaged in sexual misconduct at some point in their ministry.

- Only 31% of church leaders address the issue of adultery head-on with their congregation.
- 22% of clergy members admit to using their positions of authority to engage in sexual relationships with parishioners.
- 15% of clergy members have experienced unwanted sexual advances from congregation members.
- 42% of church leaders have received formal training on how to address and prevent infidelity within their congregation.

This behaviour disqualifies people from the pastorate and from kingdom, and quite a number of them at that. But that does not take into account the numbers of people who commit adultery in their hearts, *Mat 5:27 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: Mat 5:28 But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart*. Instead of introducing their congregations to the niceties of predestination, or spending long amounts of time arguing for the pre-millennial second coming, or on tithing, or the Sabbath and so on, the preacher would be better off preaching on the sin of adultery, because that sin will stop a large percentage of his congregation going to heaven.

You may recall Ravi Zacharias fall from grace a few years ago. I never warmed to him as a speaker, he was I thought, “all knowledge and porridge” as my Christian brother Bob Whitmarsh used to say of preachers who really said nothing much practical on personal sin. As far as I can tell, Zacharias never preached on adultery, or any of the other sins of 1 Corinthians chapter 6. He spoke mostly on apologetics, high flown words you could be distracted with, to be anaesthetised from your sins with. When he fell upon this sin, adultery, “significant evidence of sexual misconduct” was cited, everyone was so surprised, and some leapt to his defence, like this report in Christian News.

> Margie Zacharias has broken her silence to defend her late husband, the apologist Ravi Zacharias, from sexual and spiritual abuse findings which caused Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (RZIM) to reorganise.
>
> "There is absolutely no way that Ravi is guilty as charged, convicted, cancelled and executed, some even going so far as to claim that he never knew the Lord," Margie (his wife) wrote in an email to her friends. "It is not because I am in denial. It is because I knew him and because there is absolutely no evidence to support anything contrary," she continued.
>
> Earlier this year, the findings of an investigation commissioned by RZIM and carried out by law firm Miller & Martin, confirmed that Ravi Zacharias engaged in "**sexting, unwanted touching, spiritual**

> **abuse, and rape**". The report revealed harrowing testimonies of several female spa workers that Ravi Zacharias had abused. However, since the release of the report Margie had stayed silent and only their son Nathan Zacharias had spoken out defending Ravi.
>
> "He could never have kept a secret like they are alleging (alleging, I say, as there is not one whit of evidence to support what they are saying). At the very least, with all the medication he was on at the end and his hallucinations something would have come out if something were there," the email continued.

A loyal wife but such is the "deceitfulness of sin", *Heb 3:13 But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Heb 3:14 For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end*. If we can deceive ourselves, be in denial, then it should not be difficult to deceive those who are very close to us.

The **Modesto Manifesto** or Billy Graham rule is a code of conduct among male evangelical Protestant leaders, in which they avoid spending time alone with women to whom they are not married. It is adopted as a display of integrity, a means of avoiding sexual temptation, to avoid any appearance of doing something considered morally objectionable, as well as for avoiding accusations of sexual harassment or assault. In 2017, it began to be also called the Mike Pence rule, after the US vice president, a practicing Christian, who also supported the idea. Zacharias was not honest with his wife.

Many teachers will be cursed by their congregation for not having warned them of the things that were needful, and probably to their faces because they are likely to end up in the same hell hole as them. A lot of ministers are afraid to preach these subjects, others can't because they are caught up in those sins, and a lot of the so called preachers do not have a biblical call. But adultery is just one of the sins we commit, and there are others, like homosexuality. The blind fools in the church of England say the following, (CoE website),

> A selection of readings and prayers for same-sex couples who wish to mark and give thanks for their love in faith before God was formally commended for use by the Church of England's bishops in December 2023. Many churches are now in the process of adopting these prayers of dedication, thanksgiving and asking for God's blessing, and would be delighted for same-sex couples to request to use these special as part of a regular public Church of England service. Individual ministers can choose whether or not they offer these Prayers of Love and Faith. Your local church can advise you or you can find a church where they are available by entering your postcode and the term "Prayers of Love and

Faith" on achurchnearyou.com. It is not legally possible for Church of England clergy to carry out same-sex marriages.

That's not just the homosexuals that are involved, it is the congregations that also give their approval to the anti-scriptural practice. Because they have dumped the scriptures, they are free to invent any teaching that they want. Shame also upon you who keep silent knowing the truth. Do you not know*, Mat 7:21 Not everyone who calls me their Lord will get into the kingdom of heaven. Only the ones who obey my Father in heaven will get in. Mat 7:22 On the day of judgment many will call me their Lord.* ***They will say, "We preached in your name, and in your name we forced out demons and worked many miracles."*** *Mat 7:23 But I will tell them, "I will have nothing to do with you! Get out of my sight, you evil people!"* CEV. Do you hear what Jesus says, "*Not everyone who calls me their Lord will get into the kingdom of heaven".* You may call Him what you will but that does not get you around your neglect or false teaching.

A preacher of the gospel, a pillar of society, eloquent, teaching in Jesus name, doing wonderful things, is brought to nothing. It was practical Christianity that helped Jesus, not a big intellect, *Mat 25:44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Mat 25:45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. Mat 25:46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal*.

It is these practical things that really count, **"***Don't you know that evil people won't have a share in the blessings of God's kingdom? Don't fool yourselves! No one who is immoral or worships idols or is unfaithful in marriage or is a pervert or behaves like a homosexual will share in God's kingdom. Neither will any thief or greedy person or drunkard or anyone who curses and cheats others*".

Let's take another one of those sins, stealing. You may not take money out of the collection box, but stealing, and stealing from God is to neglect to do your religious duties, *Mal 3:7 Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return? Mal 3:8 Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings*. Do the preachers really come down upon this sin? No they do not!

Among the many sins we commit, this is probably the most fundamental. All these sins are against God, *Psa 51:3 I know about my sins, and I cannot forget my terrible guilt. Psa 51:4 You are really the one I have sinned against; I have disobeyed you and have done wrong. So it is right and fair for you to correct and*

punish me. CEV. If the pastor is not getting that across to the congregation, then everyone is going to do “that which is right in their own eyes”.

The preacher must have overcome those sins in 1 Corinthians Chapter 6, before he starts on his life’s work, and he must show it. Paul, writing to Timothy says exactly this, *1Ti 3:1 It is true that anyone who desires to be a church official wants to be something worthwhile. 1Ti 3:2 That's why officials must have a good reputation and be faithful in marriage. They must be self-controlled, sensible, well-behaved, friendly to strangers, and able to teach. 1Ti 3:3 They must not be heavy drinkers or troublemakers. Instead, they must be kind and gentle and not love money. 1Ti 3:4 Church officials must be in control of their own families, and they must see that their children are obedient and always respectful. 1Ti 3:5 If they don't know how to control their own families, how can they look after God's people? 1Ti 3:6 They must not be new followers of the Lord. If they are, they might become proud and be doomed along with the devil. 1Ti 3:7 Finally, they must be well-respected by people who are not followers. Then they won't be trapped and disgraced by the devil*. CEV.

The very self-restraint and moral purity must first be evidenced before going in front of God’s people. They have to show the people an example of how a Christian lives in his family. A marriage is the essential training ground for his life. It’s not a college degree in apologetics which makes a man suitable for the ministry, rather it is a practical course in living in a home, home working if you will.

But that is another thing that we don’t believe isn’t it! We are so desperate for preachers that we take any old Tom, Dick or Harry into the fold. It does not matter about his Biblical upbringing and training according to the Word. As long as he is there at 11 o’clock on a Sunday, has a smooth tongue and makes you laugh, doesn’t take things too seriously, doesn’t point out your personal sins, we’ll have him as our preacher. It does not matter about those little misdemeanours in 1 Corinthians Chapter 6, after all we are all sinners, and we don’t have to keep being warned of them, we’ve got a preacher who tickles our ears. And do you know what is sad? Most people want this.

I was looking through some old publications on church membership. They spent time detailing the qualifications, duties and responsibilities of members but there was nothing about the qualifications of elders. There was a bit on the duties of elders but on how they got there, into the position of elder, how they qualified, there was absolutely nothing. They could have come from a prison, you would know nothing about them. Are you giving your earthly life into the hands of someone you do not know will shepherd your soul. You expect to see a CV of someone in a secular employ which details their suitability for the task. In the church there is no such thing as a CV, so you cannot tell the suitability or the preacher. No wonder there are problem preachers.

54..... Spiritual Warfare. Part 1

Preparatory reading: Ephesians Chapter 6 v 10 - 20

We have taken a look at the various sins which can be prevalent in the churches, and some of the problems of their leaders, but what is the difference between the sins described there and spiritual warfare? Surely any fight against sin is spiritual warfare and that seems like a fair comment, but I think that there is a difference, between your personal sins and the sins instigated by the devil.

What is spiritual warfare? I think that it is firstly, the inward battles with the flesh and secondly, the external battles with the devil. It is quite naïve to think that when we sin, it is all the fault of the devil, and that we are poor victims of satan. That gives too much credit to the devil, which he does not deserve. When we sin, it is our own lusts, working in our members bringing us death, *Rom 7:5 For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death*. I am solely guilty for my own sins, *Jas 1:13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: Jas 1:14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Jas 1:15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death*.

I fight sin in myself and I fight sin elsewhere, in the world, in society, in families, in everything which lifts itself up against God, wherever satan has his claws, *1Pe 5:8 Be on your guard and stay awake. Your enemy, the devil, is like a roaring lion, sneaking around to find someone to attack. 1Pe 5:9 But you must resist the devil and stay strong in your faith. You know that all over the world the Lord's followers are suffering just as you are. 1Pe 5:10 But God shows undeserved kindness to everyone. That's why he appointed Christ Jesus to choose you to share in his eternal glory. You will suffer for a while, but God will make you complete, steady, strong, and firm. 1Pe 5:11 God will be in control forever! Amen*. CEV. This is the wider spiritual warfare that we fight.

We are engaged in a fight, but you would not think so looking at the churches. They are more like hotels or retirement homes where Christians having been rescued by Jesus, can live a life of extended leisure, basking in the glow of victory, until they get the summons to go upward to an even more luxurious rest. We do not see that the very weapon that Christ ordained to fight satan, the church, should be active, but it is or should be, *Mat 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, a small rock and upon the large rock I will build my congregation, [Gr. ekklesia – called out ones] and the gates of Hades shall not*

prevail against her. Jubilee. Leaving aside for the moment the question of "who is the rock", it is clear that the church is pounding the gates, the entrance itself, of death and the grave, smashing them down. It does this by the preaching of the Gospel not by lounging around doing nothing.

But the "church" has the enemy hidden within its ranks. In fact I would say that the enemies of true Christians, born again Christians, lie within the church, not so much out of it. The enemies of Christianity are the very people who live cheek by jowel, in the same place as Christians, *Rev 2:18 And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass; Rev 2:19 I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first. Rev 2:20* ***Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols****. Rev 2:21 And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.*

Not so, you say, the church is a spotless body, *Eph 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; Eph 5:26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, Eph 5:27* ***That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing****; but that it should be holy and without blemish*. Well, that is contingent upon a few things, like obedience, sanctification and holiness, and we should not presume upon this. This is certainly not mirrored in the people who claim this, indeed the divorce statistics among Christians counter the argument. It is far from true for most of the people making pretence of being a Christian.

This is not true of the church on earth, the carnal church, but it is true of the spiritual church, the church in heaven. The church on earth is blemished, spotted, wrinkled and dirty, not a patch on the glorious body of Christ in heaven. If I may paraphrase Paul in Romans Chapter 9, "For they *are* not all the church, which are of the church". There is the carnal and the spiritual church, the earthly and the heavenly church.

Let us see how great a problem it was, when the earthly church was in the form of Israel. Did the church honour God? At times it did but it was generally rebellious, *Act 7:37 This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. Act 7:38 This is he, that was in* ***the church in the wilderness*** *with* ***the angel which spake to him*** *in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us: Act 7:39* ***To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt****.* There it was, right at the beginning of

the nation, “the church in the wilderness”, rejecting the messenger which spoke to them, and turning back to Egypt. That was the history of the Old Testament church until they went into the Babylonian captivity for their disobedience.

But worse was to come. The church was built again, post-exile, and became an autocratic body, governed by scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees, a mixed multitude of leaders, a sort of ecumenical council. What did Jesus think of them? *Mat 23:13 But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Mat 23:14 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. Mat 23:15 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. Mat 23:16 Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!* That was what Jesus thought of them, among other things.

He was constantly at odds with them, and eventually they brutally killed Him, *Mar 14:55 And the chief priests and all the council sought for witness against Jesus to put him to death; and found none. Mar 14:56 For many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together……Act 4:25 Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? Act 4:26 The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. Act 4:27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, Act 4:28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done*.

There never was a time when the church on earth was pure, and this state of affairs continues on in the New Testament. Paul warned the Ephesian Elders of the coming troubles, *Act 20:29 For I know this, that after my departing **shall grievous wolves enter in among you**, not sparing the flock. Act 20:30 Also **of your own selves shall men arise**, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Act 20:31 Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears*. The church was as good as its leaders, but when Paul was taken, the false teachers would come to prominence. Notice that they do not come from outside, they are already in the church. They are part of that body, keeping quiet, biding their time, sharpening their teeth, growing bolder until they pounce.

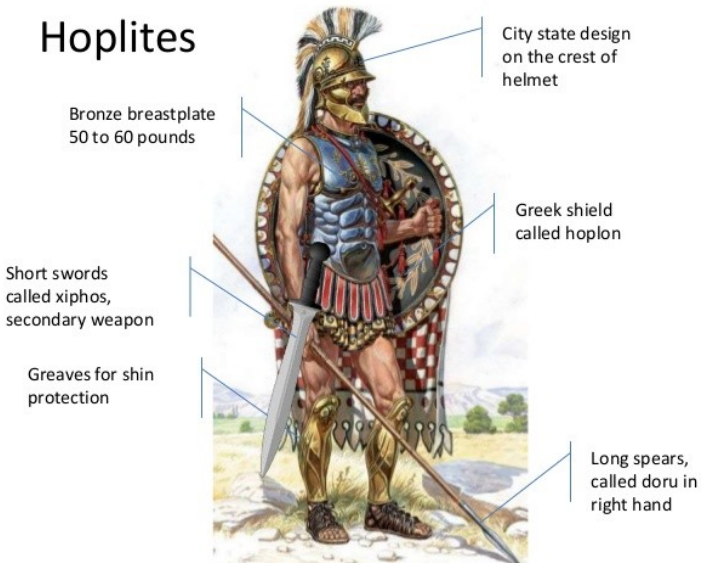
Then there are the anti-Christs, *1Jn 2:18 Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, **even now are there many***

***antichrists**; whereby we know that it is the last time. 1Jn 2:19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us*.

What are the characteristics of an anti-Christ? *1Jn 2:22 Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.....2Jn 1:7 For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist*. While we may all be looking for AN antichrist, who is the man of sin, *2Th 2:3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; 2Th 2:4 Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God*. We do not see that many of the devils children around us are imitating the man of sin, and are themselves anti-Christ.

Many Christians are like the passengers on a sinking ship, singing hymns as the boat goes down, "nearer my God to thee". Every week they sing hymns of hope, written in another age, but they have not got the character of the people who wrote the hymns. I just wonder why they sing them as they have little hope of getting into the kingdom, especially as they do not hold the beliefs of a former age. The modern churches are our greatest enemies and greatest discouragement.

How are we to counter this enemy? We spend enough time singing "Onward Christian soldiers" and "fight the good fight" but how do we fight a spiritual battle? A good way to find out is to see what weapons the Lord has given us to fight with, *Eph 6:11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Eph 6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Eph 6:13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Eph 6:14 Stand therefore, having your **loins girt about with truth**, and having on **the breastplate of righteousness**; Eph 6:15 And **your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace**; Eph 6:16 Above all, taking the **shield of faith**, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. Eph 6:17 And take **the helmet of salvation**, and **the sword of the Spirit**, which is the word of God:*


Hoplites
City state design on the crest of helmet
Bronze breastplate 50 to 60 pounds
Greek shield called hoplon
Short swords called xiphos, secondary weapon
Greaves for shin protection
Long spears, called doru in right hand

You make the armour, and God gives you the plans for it, so if you have not got sufficient protection, defective armour, and poor quality offensive weapons, it is your own fault. The image presented by Paul is of the Hoplite soldier, and the "whole armour" in the Greek is πανοπλία = panoplia, as Charles Wesley wrote, *"Stand then, in His great might, with all His strength endued; But take, to arm you for the fight, the panoply of God."* Hoplites were heavy infantrymen, citizen-soldiers of Ancient Greek city-states. Their name derives from hoplon = οπλον, referring to the weapons and armour that the soldier carried at his own expense. These fighters were mostly middle-class free citizens who were able to afford own bronze armour or weapons. They usually weren't professional soldiers, and their equipment was not standardized but had common features and original trends in various city-states.

The Christian armour/weapons consists of truth, righteousness, the Gospel, faith, and the word, with these the Christian takes the fight to the principalities and powers. I imagine that as a new Christian you had a very poor armoury, not knowing that much about the faith. You rightly, trusted in Jesus, perhaps a little too much, because there were things that you should have done, but you left it to Jesus. You still do so for all I know. Instead of getting a working knowledge of what these weapons were, which you had to have to fight the "principalities" with, you just left it to Jesus, who you thought would do all of the fighting for you. You are not alone in this negligence.

The little old ladies in the church, the old men, the congregation at large, thought that fighting was not for them, it was for the professionals and this suited the devil quite well. There was a whole army of pacifists and objectors out there who were immobilised at a stroke, they left the fighting to the pastor, who was soon overcome and that is why the church can't fight or doesn't want to fight, or doesn't even know who it is fighting.

55..... Spiritual Warfare. Part 2

Preparatory reading: Ephesians Chapter 6 v 10 - 20

Taking our cue from the image of the Hoplite Greek warrior, we as citizen soldiers in the King of Kings army, are to fight the principalities and powers, *Eph 6:12 We are not fighting against humans. We are fighting against forces and authorities and against rulers of darkness and powers in the spiritual world.* CEV. We all of us, take up arms to fight this evil, and there is not one person who is given an exemption from the battle, that is unless he is not a Christian. We are all of us charged to fight, like Timothy, *1Ti 6:12 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses*.

Are we just forgiven or are we recruited into an army to fight? I think that we all have to fight and engage in the battle with the powers of darkness as there are no grounds for pacifism. We laid out the weapons which we made or are making from Ephesians Chapter 6, **truth, righteousness, the Gospel, faith, and the word**, and it is with these that we fight satan and his devils.

The Germans have a proverb: “Lies have short legs” meaning that lies don’t make it very far, its legs carry you a little distance but cannot outrun the truth. The Germans changed that saying slightly to, “the truth has one short leg”, a reference to the wartime propaganda minister Goebbels lies. Aeschylus, the Greek tragedian said, “In war, truth is the first casualty.” That is where our war in the heavenly starts and where it shall end, with that supreme liar, the devil, *Joh 8:43 Why can't you understand what I am talking about? Can't you stand to hear what I am saying? Joh 8:44 Your father is the devil, and you do exactly what he wants. He has always been a murderer and a liar. There is nothing truthful about him. He speaks on his own, and everything he says is a lie. Not only is he a liar himself, but he is also the father of all lies. Joh 8:45 Everything I have told you is true, and you still refuse to have faith in me.* CEV.

This is the first thing that we fight for, truth, and we fight for it in numerous areas where the deceiver has cast his lies. The devil gets ahead of us by stealth and cunning craftiness and he kills by lies, disguise, false accusation, enticement, and deceit*, Gen 3:1 The snake was sneakier than any of the other wild animals that the LORD God had made. One day it came to the woman and asked, "Did God tell you not to eat fruit from any tree in the garden?" Gen 3:2 The woman answered, "God said we could eat fruit from any tree in the garden, Gen 3:3 except the one in the middle. He told us not to eat fruit from that tree or even to touch it. If we do, we will die." Gen 3:4 "No, you won't!" the snake replied. Gen 3:5 "God understands what will happen on the day you eat fruit from that tree. You will see what you have done, and you will know the difference between right and wrong, just as God does."* CEV

The devil did not use power to win the battle with Eve but deception and if the basic strategy for Satan’s spiritual assault is spreading lies, then the weapon God has given us to fight this in the battle against him is its opposite: spreading truth. The counter to lies, the answer to deception, and the antidote to deceit, is **truth**. Spiritual warfare is more about truth than it is about power encounters. Jesus does not give us a binding or loosing power to counter satan’s lies, He does not tell us that prayer against satan will defeat his lies, but Christ does, *1Co 1:24 But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. 1Co 1:25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men*.

One of the biggest lies of the devil that we fight against is “the concept of God” and that He had nothing to do with the creation of man, it happened by blind chance without the need for a God. That we should ever debate “creationism” among so called Christians, instead of just praising God for His creation is an admission of how the truth has been compromised and undermined, to make us even question it. This false idea with Darwin as the flag bearer of the devil, has grasped so many minds, both young and old, that it has achieved the status of fact, “If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it”.

In this world we must remember that two groups of people exist, the Christians and the rest of mankind. These two groups have different mindsets, or to use another phrase, different world views. Of course, satan wants to keep a hold on his kingdom and even tempted Jesus with it, *Mat 4:8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; Mat 4:9 And saith unto him,* ***All these things will I give thee,*** *if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Mat 4:10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve*.

Jesus doesn’t say, “they’re not yours to give” because they were, and Jesus himself calls Satan the 'ruler of this world', *Joh 16:11 Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged*. According to Ephesians 2:2, people who fail to trust in and follow Jesus, walk 'according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.

The devil could not sway Christ from the truth and neither will he sway the Christian if we hold fast to Christ. The devil whispers that God did not create the universe, and the natural man looks around for champions to uphold his view, each one welcomed as a killer of Christianity. The big lie was that the universe created life without God, and the upshot of this is, you don’t have any sin because there is no God, there is no need of Jesus as a Saviour and there is no need of Christianity.

The liar, satan recruited Charles Darwin to his scheme, who among others came up with “the theory of evolution”, a long time before we knew anything about the cells in our bodies. Evolution states, Darwin defined **evolution** as "descent with modification," the idea that species change over time, give rise to new species, and share a common ancestor. The mechanism that Darwin proposed for evolution is natural selection. Because resources are limited in nature, organisms with heritable traits that favour survival and reproduction will tend to leave more offspring than their peers, causing the traits to increase in frequency over generations.

It is an imaginative fairy story without a scrap of scientific evidence to support it. The fairy story begins half way through the imagined process. It's like picking up a book and opening it half way through, and the miracle has happened, suddenly there is life and organisms, and evolution must be true. The morons who hold to this view, do not describe the basics of life, how the atoms got together, without intelligence or direction, and order themselves into the right kind of molecules that could be used in life. This occurs a long, long, time before it is possible to start thinking about cells. To allow for these changes they invented millions of years, as part of their fairy tale, but that isn't in the Bible and anyway, time is not a force, a power to make things happen, so have as much time as you like, it doesn't do anything. All that the Darwinist is doing is speculating about an alternative view of life. The man himself who wrote the idea down, Darwin, did not believe in God, in fact,

> He also described his loss of faith as a slow painless process: 'disbelief crept over me at a very slow rate, but was at last complete. The rate was so slow that I felt no distress, and have never since doubted even for a single second that my conclusion was correct'

He was biased in his thinking, because he did not allow for the creator to govern his mind. He was taken with the devils lie, *2Pe 3:3 Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, 2Pe 3:4 And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. 2Pe 3:5 For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: 2Pe 3:6 Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished*:

Now you say, "I am not intellectual enough to understand the finer points of this argument for life", I cannot explain all of the fine details of the chemistry and biology of life. Well, you don't have to, and even Darwin did not know it all, and neither do the wise men of this age, *1Co 1:20 Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 1Co 1:21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God,* ***it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe***.

The proof that men believe the Gospel is proof of your integrity, and that you speak the truth in Christ, not that you have to know how other people thought life began and you can show they are wrong, because it's "***by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe****".* Some people are so afraid of the intellectual arguments that they are stunned into silence, which suits the liar satan too well. Don't be afraid, take the Gospel to them and Jesus the Creator, and His death and resurrection that gives us abundant life. Now, you know that

part don’t you, the Gospel, your feet are shod with it, you are walking on firm ground that you know, and you are using that weapon to fight satan.

It is not the intellectual argument that makes a person turn from satan to Jesus, it is the emotional one, knowing that Christ died for your sin, and there you use another one of your weapons, the shield of faith. It is not a choice between evolution and creation, as competing views of why we are here, and I think it is sinful to even make a comparison between the devils lie and the fact of Christ’s truth. It is the truth of creation and you have no reason to apologise for it or defend it, you just say it like it is, and you can almost hear the devil and his minions cry in anguish at the truth of what you say.

The appearance of Jesus is enough to remind them of the inevitability of their fate, and we don’t give them the slightest glimmer of hope by compromising our views. They know that their end is coming*, Mat 8:28 And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way. Mat 8:29 And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God****? art thou come hither to torment us before the time****? You can hit back at the devil just by telling him of his fate, *Jas 4:7 For this cause be ruled by God; but make war on the Evil One and he will be put to flight before you.* BBE. Resist him and he will run away from you like the coward he is.

The demons were present in Jesus’ day, but they held the ground when it came to combat, that is until Jesus came and revealed what they were really like, *Mar 5:3 Who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains: Mar 5:4 Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him…… Mar 5:8 For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit.* Now you do not have to fear the devil, because he is defeated, but you have to be careful around him, *1Pe 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: 1Pe 5:9 Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world*.

From the lie of evolution comes another lie and it has taken hold powerfully in this day and age. It is that whereas in times past, men were men, and women were women, a new disease of the mind has spread among humans that causes them to imagine many forms of evolutionary gender. It is the most rapid and the only evolution that is supposed to have occurred in history, having taken place over the past 40 years. In modern times, LGBT-affirming so called Christian denominations, cite several reasons for their support of LGBT rights and relationships. The gender/sexuality controversy is ultimately not about these

things but it is about who is in charge, the creature or the Creator, the potter or the clay. Some of the arguments are,

1. Some say that passages in the Bible never discuss LGBT relationships as they are known today.
2. Others reject the belief in biblical inerrancy citing translation errors, biases, and other modern reinterpretations of biblical passages such as those seemingly supportive of slavery.
3. Others argue that God created LGBT people, LGBT relationships produce good-fruit, and those relationships are therefore good or the fact that Jesus never addressed homosexuality but focused on messages of love.

There are the lies of satan, i.e. that the bible never discusses LGBT. It does, because it lays down God's requirement for a relationship and gives guidance on sexuality. In the beginning there were just two sexes and they were the only ones and as far as the Bible is concerned, the only two that exist. These are allowed to marry, not the same sexes or invented sexes which cause confusion, *Mat 19:4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, Mat 19:5 And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh*? God does not recognise these inventions of man any more than He recognises bestiality.

If the devil cannot get around that one, he attacks the scripture but scripture cannot be broken, *Joh 10:34 Jesus replied: In your Scriptures doesn't God say, "You are gods"? Joh 10:35 You can't argue with the Scriptures, and God spoke to those people and called them gods.* Jesus relies upon the Scripture to which there is no answer from satan, he knows it is true, *Mat 4:3 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. Mat 4:4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*

And the third point that is made here is that "God is a God of love, a half truth, because God is going to judge the world in righteousness by Christ. How can he kill people if He loves them? It is of course conditional love.

Now you may be thinking that it is alright for normal people, but what about Inter-sex people? Inter-sex is a general term used for a variety of situations in which a person is born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't fit the boxes of "female" or "male." Sometimes doctors do surgeries on inter-sex babies and children to make their bodies fit binary ideas of "male" or "female". There are other abnormalities too like XXY or KS, Klinefelter syndrome which occurs as a result of a random error that causes a male to be born with an extra sex

chromosome. It isn't an inherited condition. Well, we could go on and on describing these birth anomalies, but where do they stand in God's eyes?

Lots of babies are born with birth defects, some are born lame and some are born blind. It is in part due to the decline of the human genome as well as man's sin. What of those poor people who are less fortunate and who do not appear "normal", can we make special rules for them, can we excuse them from the rigours of the Law of God? Do we have to be hard on them as they suffer enough? Once we start making excuses for people we will end up saying that drunkenness, or fornication is alright because I cannot control the urges, and it is a weakness in me. But why do you make me a judge, why do you ask me to reveal the secrets of a man's heart, you have to judge your own self.

I think that as a general rule, that we should observe each individual is responsible for his sin. We may cite circumstances that appear to give us a get out clause, but God makes every man answerable for his own sin and you are duty bound to seek Him on it not man. Do not act on feeling but act upon Jesus' word to you. Let Him resolve the issue with the word, and have the grace to stick with His decision, *Php 4:11 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.*

The point is, *Mat 18:8 If your hand or foot causes you to sin, chop it off and throw it away! You would be better off to go into life crippled or lame than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into the fire that never goes out. Mat 18:9 If your eye causes you to sin, poke it out and get rid of it. You would be better off to go into life with only one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fires of hell*.

We are all in the same boat, we've all got things wrong with us, and we had better look at anything, any proclivity which leads us to sin, and we had better get rid of it. The devil will make lots of excuses for our sin, and we take them willingly, but they are the lies that he told Eve.

56..... Spiritual Warfare. Part 3

Preparatory reading: Preparatory reading: Ephesians Chapter 6 v 10 - 20

2Co 10:3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: 2Co 10:4 (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) 2Co 10:5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

We saw that we fight the lies of satan, but we do not just fight the “lie”, we put truth in its place, we pull down strongholds, and we take captive their thoughts and bring them in to the obedience of Christ. But some of the lies cannot be scientifically proven, for example, organic evolution, and the mechanisms involved are so complex, and getting more complex as time goes on, that only a few people are capable of arguing about it anyway. We were not there when it happened and so we cannot describe it anymore than the evolutionist, so what do we mean by “*bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*”?

Remember too, that we are often dealing with the “carnal” mind which is at war with God, and so we will not always be dealing with rational people. How do we “captivate their thoughts”? We don’t but Christ does. We show the world and the principalities, the truth as it is in Jesus, in our lives, our prayers, in what we believe and most of all, how we respond to what Jesus says. We cannot expect the heavens, the principalities, to do anything other than sit around in tears of laughter, when we say something that doesn’t match with what we believe, because we are hypocrites. We need a “pharisectomy” and it can be a painful operation, but extremely necessary if we are to do our duty. Fighting against our inward sin is as much a part of spiritual warfare, before we go preaching to others.

The war is all around us, and poor Job suffered not knowing why, *Job 1:6 One day, when the angels had gathered around the LORD, and Satan was there with them, Job 1:7 the LORD asked, "Satan, where have you been?" Satan replied, "I have been going all over the earth." Job 1:8 Then the LORD asked, "What do you think of my servant Job? No one on earth is like him—he is a truly good person, who respects me and refuses to do evil." Job 1:9 "Why shouldn't he respect you?" Satan remarked. Job 1:10 "You are like a wall protecting not only him, but his entire family and all his property. You make him successful in whatever he does, and his flocks and herds are everywhere. Job 1:11 Try taking away everything he owns, and he will curse you to your face." Job 1:12 The LORD replied, "All right, Satan, do what you want with anything that belongs to him, but don't harm Job." Then Satan left*. CEV.

We are without excuse because we have the armour of God**, truth, righteousness, the Gospel, faith, and the word**, we now know clearly who we are fighting against, and we know that our King has charged us to fight the devil, *Rev 19:11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. Rev 19:12 His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. Rev 19:13 And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. Rev 19:14 And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. Rev*

19:15 And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. Rev 19:16 And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

Do we wait for the devil to attack us before we attack him? He is the rebel, he will not submit to Christ, he is the deceiver of mankind, and yet the Christians stand around wringing their hands, playing at religion, not knowing what to do while he casts his web of lies. We most certainly attack, "*Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ"*. We are at war although many Christians do not see it.

If the devil attacks us, then there will be many attacks on Jesus also, and many lies put about by satan are to tempt man to false worship. The people that get sucked into this lie are sometimes good but ignorant people, people trying to serve the Lord but doing so on the basis of their feelings and emotions rather than upon the word of God. One of the things that we like to do is to try and express ourselves with the grandeur of the Almighty, and we do this with magnificent buildings, dressing up, ceremonies and pageant, while our hearts are refusing to be conformed to God and all of this is a cloak for sin. Why don't we see this, why don't we look for the way we are to worship the Lord? It is because we are deceived and complacent.

The devil uses a distraction technique very much like some "magicians" use. You come to Jesus but you suddenly became distracted and in a short time you are no longer following a Biblical Jesus but a denominational Jesus. It was what satan did at the beginning, cast doubt on God's way. You are taken along to a church but you do not ask questions about it, and you certainly don't question the minister. The style, the layout, the furniture, the language, the type of worship are all accepted by you without question, and in an instant you are worshipping the image of Jesus invented by that denomination, and what is worse you don't even know it. Then you get into the habit of "going to church", you know, the building down the road. But God doesn't live there, *Act 7:48 Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Act 7:49 Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool:* ***what house will ye build me****? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Act 7:50 Hath not my hand made all these things? Act 7:51 Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.*

Concerning the matter of joining a church, every young Christian must, in my opinion, question where they are being led, what the quality of the people leading them is, what their religious prejudices are, what qualities and what qualifies the minister in his position. Ask them why you should join with them, and most of all, how do they worship and serve Jesus, is it according to Scripture,

get them to show it. Now I accept that a young Christian may be at a total loss as to what questions to ask, and that they must learn a lot more of what the Bible teaches, so what are they to do? Well, my advice is to learn about Jesus from the Bible because He is the master. Join with those who profess the faith but question everything, asking more questions as you go on deeper in the faith. Never shelve those questions that I put at the beginning, but ask them as and when you are able (question where they are being led, what the quality of the people leading them is, what are their religious prejudices are, what qualities and what qualifies the minister in his position). Never take a non-biblical approach to anything, and if the particular group you affiliate with do not adopt the approach of providing Scriptural practice for what they believe and do, start to question whether you should be a part of them.

Another lie is that a “building” is the “church”. Don’t get me wrong, the buildings are magnificent, the history of them is intriguing, the architecture is magnificent, but it is just not the church, which is by Biblical definition, **God’s people,** *Mat 18:17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.* **You don’t talk to a building do you?** By taking the term church and switching it to a building, the spotlight is taken off of us, the people of God, and instead of us making ourselves “holy”, we make a building holy, a special sanctuary holy. Then we start calling the church building “God’s house”, a holy place, as if He lived there. And then we think that because the Divine presence is abiding there, God is inside the building, and He is no longer outside of it, and the consequence is that we can behave differently inside the building, to the way we do outside the building.

This is Old Testament thinking and it is making the building where people meet like the tabernacle or Temple. It is falling back into the carnal worship and turning back to what Christ has dissolved, *Heb 9:7 But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people: Heb 9:8 The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: Heb 9:9 Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; Heb 9:10* ***Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation****. Heb 9:11 But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come,* ***by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands****, that is to say,* ***not of this building****; Heb 9:12 Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. Heb 9:13 For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: Heb 9:14 How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered*

himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

We are free of all this Old Testament bondage, we have cut the ties, *Joh 4:23 But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him*. We do not need special buildings, we have our homes if we are stuck for a place to meet, but the Lord is in the midst of His people, wherever they meet, *Mat 18:20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*. You do not need a minister, or special person to lead your meetings, the Father wants honest people to worship Him.

The devil's lie is such that he would keep us in bondage and not worship and serve Christ and this lie is so powerful, that the people in the denominations and their minister's, will fight you tooth and nail to preserve the devils lie. Sometimes we need help seeing the true spiritual state of affairs and it is essential if we are to get out of this rut of formalism and kill the lie that where we worship and how we worship was set up by God. Having lied that the "church" is God's home, the devil is ready for another lie, that your home **is not** God's dwelling place.

Your home is the place where you worship God in spirit and truth, isn't it? Yes, you can worship Him anywhere, but you spend a lot of time in your home, so shouldn't it be a place of worship? But it seems to me we kick God out of the door when we want to use it for a reason that we would rather not like to have God witness. We don't let God back in until we have got rid of the mockers and the bawdy gainsayers, until we have thrown all the booze bottles away after the parties, until we are certain that we are in a fit state to be called "Christian" again. If that is your God he must have one eye because he doesn't see very clearly that you are a hypocrite and have double standards of worship.

If we keep working on those weapons, the panoply of God, the armour of God**, truth, righteousness, the Gospel, faith, and the word**, honing them to perfection, we shall overcome the wiles of satan. But that is another of his deceits, he is thee thief of time. For every man an hour is the same length, but it is taken up with so many things and most of those things that we do, have little value and are of little worth in eternity. The man who spends his time garnering wealth in life cannot take it with him*, Luk 12:18 And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. Luk 12:19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. Luk 12:20 But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? Luk 12:21 So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God*. All of his money he leaves behind to someone else.

All of the hobbies and sports and pastimes are time wasters, *1Ti 4:7 But reject irreverent, silly myths. Instead, train yourself for godliness. 1Ti 4:8 For physical exercise is of limited value, but godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for the present life and for the one to come.* BSB. We train in our professions which will be of no use in heaven and put in the meanest amount of time studying the Word of God, which benefits our immortal soul. It is as much as we can do to attend a few hours with Christians but we have no trouble spending inordinate amounts of time with unbelievers, and let's get rid of that lie which we make up, that we are there evangelising them. They have too big a sway in our lives especially as we should be fighting the wickedness that they stand for.

A novel may seem to be a relaxing read, and the devil will gently nudge you into a fantasy land, but are we given over to reading Scripture? No Christian knows it perfectly and it is a hard read in places, but woe to the man who says it is boring, because if it is boring to him then no place will be found in Jesus' kingdom for him.

Neglect of reading the Scripture is another deceit brought about by satan. He whispers that you know enough to get by, and in an instant he has compromised your weapons. They are put aside and left to rust, so that they will be little use in the fight against satan. By this lie he has won a great battle without a shot being fired. We are like Britain appeasing the Nazi's, being willfully deceived by the lies of satan. We fall into his trap by believing his lies instead of God's word. Once on the path of appeasement we will allow all teaching into the assembly. We will fail to drive all those people out whom God has proscribed and we will compromise the truth. The "woke" lies of the people which they are trying to get us to affirm are an example of this capitulation.

The truth of God's word is worth dying for. You have to die anyway but for what cause? Better to be a martyr for truth than a coward for compromise. As long as we keep fighting the devil's lies we are winning the battle, *Isa 57:19 I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the LORD; and I will heal him. Isa 57:20 But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.* ***Isa 57:21 There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked****.*

57..... The Devils Propaganda Machine

Preparatory reading: Matthew Chapter 18 verse 1 - 5

Last time we looked at the way the devil sows his lies among gullible Christians and takes them captive, and we looked at what passes for Christianity which is nothing like the New Testament, *2Ti 2:24 And the servant of the Lord must not*

strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, 2Ti 2:25 In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; 2Ti 2:26 And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

As well as the structure of the churches, the devil has had an eye on the other teachings of the church. You can be sure that if he cannot defeat Jesus, he will try another tack and try to take His glory. Prophecy is one way the devil works to confuse and mislead Christians. Dispensationalism is one of the most dangerous teachings that have come into the church in the last 200 years and I think that it is satanic. This generally held view of the end times is typified by the popular speaker John MacArthur,

> MacArthur describes himself as a "leaky dispensationalist." MacArthur holds to the dispensationalist school of pre-millennialism, a pre-tribulational Rapture of the Church, and a literal Millennium. He teaches a completely restored Israel shall inherit physical ownership of the land of Canaan on the earth.

Dispensationalism is the devils carnal view which has infiltrated the teaching of the church and looks to an earthly fulfilment of prophecy, including a “completely restored Israel”, that is a national Israel. This article states what is wrong with the pre-millennialist position,

> The Scriptures teach that the church was built by Jesus Christ (Matthew 16:18)*, was purchased by His precious blood (Acts 20:28), is revealed in the New Testament and originated in the mind of God. It was eternally purposed by God (Ephesians 3:11) and designed to be a part of God's redemptive plan for man (Ephesians 5:23). A distinguishing phase of premillennialism, however, is the view that the establishment of the church was not prophesied in the Old Testament. The idea is that the kingdom was foretold by Old Testament prophets and was announced by John the Baptist and by Christ, but because the Jews rejected Christ (the Messiah) it was postponed and the church was devised to serve as a substitute or contingent. The period in which we are now living is "the church age," and is to continue until Christ comes again. Then there will follow the establishment of the old Jewish kingdom, at which time Jesus will occupy the literal throne of David in Jerusalem where He will reign for one thousand years. During this millennium the temple will be rebuilt, and even the Levitical sacrifices of the Old Testament will be re-established. This is the general structure of the premillennial view, and their distinction between the kingdom and the church is clear.

*Remember that we have shown that Jesus was speaking under the Old Testament and that the Church Jesus built existed from the beginning of the world, *Heb 12:22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, Heb 12:23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, Heb 12:24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel*. I like this interpretation, *Heb 12:23 Here you will find all of God's dearest children, whose names are written in heaven. And you will find God himself, who judges everyone. Here also are the spirits of those good people who have been made perf*ect. CEV.

When we visited Israel, we met some Jews, four types of Jews. There was the young female soldier, dutiful, but not really into the religion, but none the less a Jew. Then there was a young man who had lived his life on a Kibbutz but he too took his religion as a quaint tradition but called himself a Jew. There was the orthodox Jew who stopped his van to pray in the street with his head covered and his long side locks hanging down, and then there was the ultra-orthodox Jew or Hasidic Jew we met at Caesarea, these are a branch of Orthodox Judaism that is considered ultra-Orthodox. They tend to interpret the Torah literally and follow charismatic leaders called Rebbes. They believe that piety and devotion are more important than Torah study and religious scholarship.

Although they all called themselves “Jews”, none of them follow the Judaism of the Old Testament and some don’t even believe the Bible. Are these the Jews that the dispensationalist’s are looking to be saved? There is of course nothing to stop them being saved any more than you or I. But the only way that they can be saved, any man on earth can be saved, is by the blood of Christ, and since there is **neither Jew nor Greek in Christ,** we all enter the faith on the same terms. Tell me where in the New Testament there is an undoing of this unity and a special treatment given to the Jews? Where is the reinstatement of the Jew or Jewish race? But this error of dispensationalism goes further and even has the Temple rebuilt on earth to accommodate these errant fictitious Jews!

Where does it say that an earthly Temple will be rebuilt, Jesus said, *Joh 2:19 Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Joh 2:20 Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? Joh 2:21 But he spake of the temple of his body*. They only understood this word of Jesus when He was raised from the dead, *Joh 2:22 When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, **and the word which Jesus had said***. They didn’t have to wait 2000 years for another temple to be built before they believed, they believed that Jesus was the Temple! The earthly Temple, a shadow of the heavenly Temple, was destroyed

and Jesus only remains, *Rev 21:22 And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of* it. Dispensationalism is madness and shows the deceits of satan, and I will return to it, God willing, in the future, for by it the devil deceives us.

But what of those congregations that sit under satan's teaching and swallow it all hook, line and sinker? Why aren't they speaking out against it? These are often professional people, intelligent people, people with careers and responsibilities, how do these people get deceived? They have studied to become competent in earthly things, their work, their hobbies, their sports, but in the things of Christ there is a great neglect. They rely too much on a minister and not enough on their personal study. They could become equally as learned as the minister if they threw their junk away and devoted more time to the Lord, but they do not. They have substituted ministers which they pay for instead of studying the Scripture, and they rely on the minister. They follow what he teaches without questioning it and that's how they adopt these weird ideas.

I do not minister the word as a substitute for your personal study, it is purely supplementary. You need to do as much as keeps your mind occupied with heaven and have some bread left over to share with your brethren from your studies. I do not find 3 minute daily scriptural readings or daily meditations a very useful substitute for personal study and I don't think you should either. You can very easily tell how much personal study someone does, by seeing what they bring to a meeting with them, and it is generally nothing. All those hours in a week and all you've got to show for your time with the Lord, is nothing or a few scriptures you have cobbled together.

It's disgraceful, but it's the sort of church man has built, with some encouragement of the devil, because he doesn't want you to know scripture and as you are not disposed to study it, he is laughing at you. The armour becomes ineffective, **truth, righteousness, the Gospel, faith, and the word,** all shrink away in compromise and laziness until there is little left to fight with and no one to fight with you. And it is in this way that you get the false ideas of prophecy and swallow the devils lies.

I would exhort you, if you are finding study hard or are not getting and answers to questions of the faith, to pray to Him to guide you. Talk to Jesus while you are studying, treat study as a conversation with God and don't look to do it on your own. And pray also that you can also edify your brethren by having something to give them of the word. If it is in the Scripture anyone can study it. It is not difficult and only satan will make it too complex for you, as part of his technique of deceit. Remember, *Mat 18:2 Jesus called a child over and had the child stand near him. Mat 18:3 Then he said: I promise you this.* ***If you don't change and become like a child, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven.*** *Mat*

18:4 But if you are as humble as this child, you are the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. CEV. You are the children of God, live up to that.

This week a man called Hugh Ross a Canadian Astrophysicist who says he is a Christian, was brought to my attention by some Christians who saw one of his videos and were impressed by it. These comments taken from Answers in Genesis, sum up part of his rationalization of the Bible,

> Hugh Ross, believes the ancient world was peopled with pre-Adamic intelligent but soulless human-like bipedal beings who painted on cave walls and buried their dead. Not being made in the image of God, however, they were only placeholders in this world with no possible place in the next. Noting that this amounts to a belief that soulless humans, though Dr. Ross would not call them human, lived before Adam and Eve, we have often called attention to the inconsistencies of Dr. Ross's position with the Word of God.

O, how grateful we are to Ross for explaining the Bible, for telling us the God was a little mixed up in His thinking, and some Two Thousand years after the death of our Saviour, he has come along to tell us his truth, that the world is billions of years old, and that death was present to those primatives but they were of the line of Adam. Death was there before Adam, except it wasn't really death as we know it. You are a deceiver Ross, for you work for satan.

He has swallowed the evolutionist time scales as true, and rejected the statements of the Bible. Instead of conforming his ideas to the Bible he conforms them to secular science, which takes precedence over God's word, but he is a learned fool, *1Co 3:18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. 1Co 3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. 1Co 3:20 And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain*.

He has made up a story that there were creatures living on earth before Adam, soulless beings and God chose two of the beings, Adam and Eve to be singled out and become the first human beings. What is his authority for believing that over the Bible account of the creation of man? It sounds very much like the "Homo Divinus" that came from another imaginary creation story, this time by the celebrated Anglican, John Stott. This article was from an ear witness to his heresy, Paul F. Taylor,

> It was in late 1986 that I travelled to Leeds, in Yorkshire, England, to listen to a lecture by legendary evangelical preacher John Stott. That cold, wet, and windy November evening made for dangerous driving over the Pennine hills from Stalybridge, but my friends and I – all

> members of Mottram Congregational Church – were looking forward to warm fellowship and, we hoped, sound exposition.
>
> In his lecture, he commented that it was essential for Christians to believe that there had been a real, historical man called Adam; otherwise, passages such as Romans 5 or 1 Corinthians 15 did not make sense. Now, I had one reservation about the great Dr. Stott, many of whose books I had read and enjoyed, because I had heard that he believed in the theory of evolution. So, when he had finished, I had the privilege of asking the first question.
>
> I asked how he could believe in Adam and in evolution. He replied that "**Adam must have been the first evolved ape, that God had breathed into him, and, therefore, "he became a kind of homo divinus"**. This was probably the first occasion that the phrase was used, but I have heard it many times since from many evangelical preachers. With the greatest of respect to the great man, the idea of Adam as the first evolved ape will not do because the whole point of Romans 5 is that before Adam, there was no death of any sort in the world – not even the death of apes. We must believe not just in Adam but that he was exactly as the Bible states.

That statement "**Adam must have been the first evolved ape, that God had breathed into him, and, therefore, "he became a kind of homo divinus"** is a another story, made up in his sinful mind, and it is not a Christian account. You are a deceiver Stott, for you speak for satan. I could equally come up with a story that a space ship carrying DNA crashed and it formed all life on earth, and the beings were our fore bearers, which is remarkably like the Sci-Fi film Promethius (2012). They all invent fairy tales because they cannot bear God's word to have rule over them and they rapidly fall into the snare of satan's lie.

Why must we try and explain away things that we can barely grasp, or have no knowledge about? We have to have an explanation because it is simply not enough to trust in the infinite power of God. A child cannot understand some of the things that his father does, although he may try to copy him, and often badly. I have told you the story of when my father was studying, and he used logarithmic tables to calculate sums, and that I got hold of the log tables and tried to copy him. But I did not know what I was doing, and it was only when I got to senior school that I learned how to use them. I think that it is the same with the wise men of this generation that they are really like children in comparison with the Almighty, thinking they know how everything works but in reality knowing nothing.

Jesus has warned us that the devil “is a liar and the father of lies”, *Joh 8:44 Your father is the devil, and you do exactly what he wants. He has always been a murderer and a liar. There is nothing truthful about him. He speaks on his own, and everything he says is a lie. Not only is he a liar himself, but he is also the father of all lies. Joh 8:45 Everything I have told you is true, and you still refuse to have faith in me*. CEV. When we come to Christ we have a new spirit, but our minds are still filled with satan’s foolishness, the lies we readily believed that “deceived” and “enslaved” us, *Tit 3:3 We used to be stupid, disobedient, and foolish, as well as slaves of all sorts of desires and pleasures. We were evil and jealous. Everyone hated us, and we hated everyone. Tit 3:4 God our Savior showed us how good and kind he is. Tit 3:5 He saved us because of his mercy, and not because of any good things that we have done. God washed us by the power of the Holy Spirit. He gave us new birth and a fresh beginning.* CEV.

“A key element of our own rescue, then, is reversing the process. We are to “lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,” and “be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self which...has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbour...”

Having been rescued, we are even more on guard, the ability to fight back has begun and we are now on the offensive.

58..... Spotting the Lie

Preparatory reading: Revelation Chapter 12

The devil is a scammer. He scams you with lies, promises, riches, a life of pleasure, but it is all a deceit, a mask, because he will do all that he can to get you back into his fold, and steal you back from Jesus, *Rev 12:12 because of this be glad, ye heavens, and those in them who do tabernacle; woe to those inhabiting the land and the sea, **because the Devil did go down unto you, having great wrath, having known that he hath little time.'** Rev 12:13 And when the dragon saw that he was cast forth to the earth, he pursued the woman who did bring forth the male*, YLT.

One of the first scams we encounter as a new Christian is that “you have to attend a church (building)”. This is a lie, for there is nothing in Scripture which tells you that you have to do this. It does say, *Heb 10:24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Heb 10:25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching*. This is an exhortation to “be a church”, to exhort us on our way, not go to church, as we see the day approaching, but that does not happen.

As dear children of God, having first come to the Saviour, and having seen the change which God brings about in you, having felt the joy and release from satan's power, why on earth and heaven, do you then seek man's guidance and not continue in the grace of God? Why do you succumb to man to be your guide, do what man says he thinks you should do, *Gal 1:6 I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Gal 1:7 Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. Gal 1:8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed*.

This is the first lie that we encounter. It seems good on the face of it, that "we should join a church", but look at the people in it and you may become like them in a short time, pushing Jesus and His word aside for something else that He never asked of you. It is good to meet with believers, but you should never forget that the one you serve is Christ, *Rev 2:4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because* ***thou hast left thy first love****. Rev 2:5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent*. You began with Jesus and you go on with Jesus and you should never forget that or else you had better stop calling yourself a Christian.

And I will just point out to you who say you must meet with the church, because you will grow cold if you do not meet, and you will lose your mutual enthusiasm for the things of Christ. Tell me, do you meet regularly, spontaneously with anybody from "the church" to talk about Christ from one week to the next? Do you regularly have members of your church around for a fellowship meal? Do you spend much time when you do meet as a body, edifying others, or do you just sit there in a pew and get spoken to? You will see your meetings are not spontaneous and your worship, if that is what it can be called is just a sham and convenience, not like the big "love in" you make it out to be. The "church" can be a distraction and a time stealer from the things of Christ.

The devil, like all scammers, will try to rush you into making a decision, and it is this sort of panic that he delights in. But what have you to be panicked for, you have made a decision to follow Christ, you are a blood bought child of God, there is no rush to see how the land lies, you have as much time as you need to make an assessment of the churches. No one can take you out of God's hand, no one can add anything to the work of Christ on your behalf, you just have to go on following Jesus. You can ask Him what your priorities are, not what man's priorities are.

You are a member of Christ's church, you have been born into it, *Heb 12:22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly*

Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, Heb 12:23 To the general assembly and ***church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven****, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, Heb 12:24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.* You must now gather with those people, the people of a heavenly mind, and you must seek out true believers, not pew squatters in an institutional church.

Scams exist for a number of reasons, not least because we are gullible. We forget that sin is still fighting against God within us, and we have this inbuilt urge to sin unless we are governed by God's word and Spirit. People fall for scams because they are not good at following advice, vulnerable, not clued up on scamming techniques, unaware of the threats scammers pose, or are easily manipulated. What are the red flags of a scammer? Don't respond to unsolicited cold calls, emails, junk mail, late-night commercials or infomercials, or social media posts that are either overly attractive or fear-inducing. These are all common tactics scammers use to entice you to engage. The devil too tries to rush you into a decision that you have not given full consideration to.

Let's put that list into Bible speak. Don't respond to unsolicited cold calls, i.e. don't respond to any words which do not come from Jesus and the Bible. Don't respond to emails, junk mail, i.e. don't respond to ideas, however attractive, that lead you from the truth in Jesus. Don't respond to late-night commercials or infomercials, or social media posts that are either overly attractive or fear-inducing, i.e. when you are tired you can lose your sharpness and your perspective on issues is dulled, sleep on the matter and tackle it when you are fully functioning. Knowing your own limitations is equally important if you are to function as a soldier.

"A person who can see will not easily stumble into a ditch, even a small one. He'll walk around it. A blind person, on the other hand, will walk right over a cliff because no matter how deep or wide the abyss, he does not know it is there. In the same way, Satan can foist a very big lie on the world, one so obvious that thoughtful Christians easily see through it, yet the world at large will be oblivious to it because they cannot see it. They have been blinded.

And here is the clue, the "tell," the giveaway that reveals the scheme and helps inform our own counteroffensive against it in the battle. Look for the big spiritual lie that seems completely transparent, the obvious ploy that appears ridiculously ham-handed, the massive ditch that can't be missed but the world doesn't seem to see, the abyss the blind masses fall into without giving it a second thought. Find that and you will find the scheme. If you wonder why anyone would buy into such an obvious spiritual error, if the gullibility of the throng perplexes you, if you catch yourself saying, "This makes no sense," then you have probably stumbled onto a scheme. You have identified a maneuver in the battle, since the

only explanation for such lack of spiritual perception is spiritual blindness, and we now know who is responsible for that."

Let me give an example of such a scheme, the immigration scam. In fact I no longer regard myself as English, because many of the people who claim asylum or just arrive here do not bother to learn or speak English. I am therefore "Old English", you know, like the Old Amish. If you tried to enter the country legitimately you would be made to jump through hoops, but if you are an "economic migrant" or "fleeing injustice" or even "looking for a better life" you are welcome and never mind the visa. If you break the rules of entry, you are welcomed with open arms, but if you try the legal route you are encumbered with difficulty. I cannot but think that the migrants choose to come in the way that they do, because they are encouraged by "government".

If somebody turned up on your doorstep and barged their way into your house, set up camp in your living room, stated cooking meals on your cooker, without so much as an invitation or a request to enter, they would be put on a charge. But we have dropped the word illegal immigrant and replaced it with economic migrant because it is less threatening, and this is a side show to what else is happening. Have you noticed how language is changing? We have developed a suffix "phobia" to describe an attitude towards certain groups of people. Islamophobia is a fear, hatred, and discrimination against practitioners of Islam or the Islamic religion as a whole. It is a blanket term used, however wrongly, aimed at diverting any criticisms of this Muslim group back onto the people who would make a comment upon it.

It is said that Islam is the most dangerous religion, but if we turned the clock back in time upon people who called themselves Christian in the time of the Inquisition, we would have said Christianity was the most dangerous religion. We can of course cite many acts of violence by members of Islam, for example, September 11, 2001 and the killing of around 3000 people in the New York terror attack, the Isis or Daesh murders of Aid workers, the London Bombings, the murder of Lee Rigby, the unprovoked attack by Hamas killing 1200 people a majority of who were Civilians. There are a lot more atrocities that have been committed in the name of radical Islam. The atheist Sam Harris, tweeted, "Islamophobia is a word created by fascists, and used by cowards, to manipulate morons."

It certainly seem like there is a connection between Islam, the boat people, and the radicalisation of Muslims. It is so easy to join some of the dots and come to a conclusion that this is the current enemy of the church. But wait a minute, is that true? The Bible says that we fight "not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers". Our enemy is not earthly. And while we are tarring all Muslims with the brush of terrorism and dishonesty, we don't see that we have slipped into prejudice.

And if it is true, which I think that it is, that the final victory is the Lord's, *Rev 19:11 I looked and saw that heaven was open, and a white horse was there. Its rider was called Faithful and True, and he is always fair when he judges or goes to war.....Rev 19:19 I also saw the beast and all kings of the earth come together. They fought against the rider on the white horse and against his army. Rev 19:20 But the beast was captured and so was the false prophet. This is the same prophet who had worked miracles for the beast, so that he could fool everyone who had the mark of the beast and worshiped the idol. The beast and the false prophet were thrown alive into a lake of burning sulfur. Rev 19:21 But the rest of their army was killed by the sword that came from the mouth of the rider on the horse. Then birds stuffed themselves on the dead bodies*. What is the need of spiritual warfare on our part anyhow? The devils even know what awaits them, *Mat 8:28 And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way. Mat 8:29 And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God?* ***art thou come hither to torment us before the time?***

Aren't we also forgetting something? We ourselves are not perfect, and we are equally led astray by this evil world and its ruler, our minds are part of the battleground and our Master told us to be kind, loving, go the extra mile, be careful how we judge, judge not according to appearance but judge righteously, yet here we are condemning Muslims for having a different belief which they cannot by nature fix, we condemn millions on the basis that a few madmen are killers, propagating a view which has a basis in prejudice not in fact. And we are the people that Jesus has sent out to save the world? Who will we save, and how will our prejudice stop us from gaining an entry to the lost?

I think that this is the scam, the big lie of satan, because it makes us such self righteous hypocrites, condemning others for supposed sins, and not looking at our own failure to get the facts, to be diligent, to be truthful, to be righteous, because we are rushed into our conclusions by the devil. Instead of seeing how bad we are, the devil says, no, you are alright, it's the others who are against you, and he gets us fighting a new war on people and taking our eyes off of him, and so diverting our attack. One thing we must know about satan is that he doesn't even love his own, there is not one act of kindness he has ever done, and he will destroy any and every part of Creation that he gets his claws into.

We also know in part, but it is somehow necessary that we appear to have all the answers, which we do not. This is equally true in science as it is in Bible studies. Some people have all the answers, for example, such titles as, "What bible says about the end time", as if it is so obvious to the writer that it becomes "truth" and here is all the Bible has to teach on the end times. "What the Bible says" is really an opinion of "what the Bible says", it is an interpretation of what the Bible

says, it is my view of what the Bible says, but “What does the Bible say to you?” It’s your responsibility to find out what the Bible says on all of its issues, not to regurgitate what some man has said, me included. When we don’t know the answer we should be honest and say so.

In this world of visible and invisible realities, it is often difficult to see what route we should negotiate trough it. Joseph saw both sides of providence with him in the middle, *Gen 50:20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.* There is good and evil all around us, and sometimes we just don’t see either clearly, because we view providence with carnal eyes not spiritual, like Joseph.

This scenario is presented to us in the book of Kings, when Syria warred against Israel, *2Ki 6:15 And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? 2Ki 6:16 And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. 2Ki 6:17 And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha*. We get a glimpse of a bigger picture, where Elisha gives his servant an insight, or if you prefer, a sight of what he is seeing.

Elisha was aware of God’s universe in a way that his servant wasn’t, and as much as we would like to see what is going on, we don’t and we just see it through his eyes. There are others in the faith who have seen this other world and who have warned us of it. Sometimes we see it for what it is, better than at other times, but sometimes satan is so subtle that we fall for his scams. Sometimes we see enemies where there are none and at times we don’t see the enemy at all because he is camouflaged.

Prejudice gets the better of us and so we do not see the enemy within us, and this nullifies any good that we would do. “Know thyself" is a philosophical maxim which was inscribed upon the Temple of Apollo in the ancient Greek precinct of Delphi. I think it is true for the Christian embarking on warfare, because if he doesn’t know himself, he is destined to fight the wrong enemy. Like Paul, he must recognise that nothing good comes from his flesh, *Rom 7:18 I know that my selfish desires won't let me do anything that is good. Even when I want to do right, I cannot*. CEV.

He stands close to Christ, *Rom 8:2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death*. It is by that closeness to Christ, imitating His armour, doing things that He has said in His way, that we shall overcome satan, *Eph 6:13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of*

God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

59..... The Sermon to End all Sermons

Preparatory reading: Matthew Chapter 5

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bnlis5aTA9s The Beatitudes.

We have seen the human condition laid bare in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, and we have seen that we cannot engage those powers of darkness effectively without the armour of Christ, and now we go even further into our souls by looking at "The Sermon on the Mount".

Mat 5:1 And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: Mat 5:2 And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Mat 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Mat 5:4 Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Mat 5:5 Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Mat 5:6 Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Mat 5:7 Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Mat 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Mat 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Mat 5:10 Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Mat 5:11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Mat 5:12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

The sermon continues from the opening "beatitudes" in Chapter 5 through to the end of Chapter 7. I find it quite difficult to retain the order and indeed all of the sections Jesus enunciates and I have read it many times. Just think if you are hearing this sermon for the first time, how much of it would you retain? You would certainly have to have an autistic savant's gift to retain all of the words, but we are not all gifted, and in those days, when there were no recording devices, you would have forgotten most of it in a few months.

If this sermon or variants of it were preached on numerous occasions, to different people throughout Israel, to get the message of the kingdom across, then the disciples at least would have heard it often and in time might have learned it by heart. This preaching occurred on "the mountain", τὸ ὄρος, which some have supposed was the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem and others that it was on the

Mount of the Beatitudes in Galilee, and Jesus may well have taught in both places and dozens of others besides.

“By the time of the Sermon on the Mount scene, many already considered Jesus a great prophet like Moses. Matthew says that crowds gather, and Jesus ascends a “mountain.” This mountain teaching with oppressed people sounds familiar, think about Moses giving instructions at Mount Sinai to the Hebrew people recently freed from enslavement. With all these symbols working together, many in the crowd are wondering if Jesus will be some kind of rescuer: “Is this Jesus a new kind of Moses?” Matthew compares Jesus to Moses but takes care to show he’s not the same as Moses, nor is his instruction a simple repeat of Moses’ law. Jesus says he is not abolishing what Moses gave; He’s “filling it full.” Jesus’ teaching deepens and expands that first instruction (Hebrew: *torah*) from Moses.”
The first blessing Jesus gives is to “**the poor in Spirit**”, and these versions of the Bible help in some ways to understand what is being said,

- *Mat 5:3 "Great blessings belong to those who know they are spiritually in need. God's kingdom belongs to them.* ERV.
- *Mat 5:3 God blesses those people who depend only on him. They belong to the kingdom of heaven!* CEV.
- *Mat 5:3 "Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor; the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!* GNB.
- *Mat 5:3 "How blessed are those who are destitute in spirit, because the kingdom from heaven belongs to them!* ISV.

To understand this metaphor we have to understand what it means to be poor, or more particularly, a beggar = πτωχός. The beggar is so distressed in his earthly circumstances that he has nothing but the hope that his situation might improve. The verse would be better expressed, *Mat 5:3 Blessed are **beggars** in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

I had a time in my life where I lived as a vagrant. I want no pity, I just use the experience as an illustration, and I may say, the experience was short and a good jolt to get my life in some sort of order. I had a crisis of funds, to put it nicely, I only had enough money for some food or to pay the rent at the public house I was living at. I could not afford to stay there for 7 days, so I chose to live “elsewhere” at the weekends. “Elsewhere”, was under a boat on the beach, and it was a good job it was in the summer, not in the winter.

The memory I have of that time was of keeping warm at night, it got very cold under the stars, and my hunger, only assuaged by the thought of the breakfast that I could buy in the Café in the morning. And so I went through those nights buoyed up by the anticipation of a breakfast. Every time I woke up in the cold I thought of the hot breakfast and I could not wait for morning to come. I was at the café as soon as it opened and in the warm with hot food my desire was met. I

was no longer food “poor”, now I was interested in other areas of life I was poor in. I was carnal and was only satisfied for a time, and my life went from hunger to hunger, a perpetual hungering.

There was another beggar who was carried every day to a rich man’s house, *Luk 16:19 There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: Luk 16:20 And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, Luk 16:21 And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores*. ISV. Talk about rubbing his nose in his poverty, for he looked on and saw the luxury and self-indulgence of the rich man, he saw the comings and goings of the wealthy, tottering out of the house having overindulged, while he sat there getting kissed by dogs.

I think that this story is an illustration of this beatitude. The beggar is a beggar until he dies and then he is comforted in his spirit, *Luk 16:22 "One day the beggar died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. Luk 16:23 In the afterlife, where he was in constant torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus by his side. Luk 16:24 So he shouted, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me! Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water to cool off my tongue, because I am suffering in this fire.' Luk 16:25 "But Abraham said, 'My child, remember that during your lifetime you received blessings, while Lazarus received hardships. But now he is being comforted here, while you suffer*. ISV. The beggar is no longer poor and the rich man is no longer rich, the poor man is in the kingdom and the rich man is outside the kingdom, but no reason is given as to why this state of affairs came about, or what they had or had not done to deserve this.

There is no merit in the beggar any more than in the rich man, and if either got to glory it would be by the grace of God. But the poor man gets there by the merits of Christ alone, *Rev 12:10 And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night*. Christ gets you to heaven.

There is no reason given, because it is an illustration of **the beggar in spirit** who enters the kingdom, *Mat 5:3 Blessed are **beggars** in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* But like the blessings of Deuteronomy Chapter 27 for obedience, there are curses for disobedience, *Deu 27:12 **These shall stand upon mount Gerizim to bless the people,** when ye are come over Jordan; Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Joseph, and Benjamin: Deu 27:13 **And these shall stand upon mount Ebal to curs**e; Reuben, Gad, and Asher, and Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali*. And this is just what we find in Luke’s short account of the beatitudes.

Luk 6:20 And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, ***Blessed*** *be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God. Luk 6:21* ***Blesse****d are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled.* ***Blessed*** *are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh. Luk 6:22* ***Blessed*** *are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Luk 6:23 Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.....Luk 6:24 But* ***woe*** *unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Luk 6:25* ***Woe*** *unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger.* ***Woe*** *unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep. Luk 6:26* ***Woe*** *unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets*.

By this illustration we are shown what the consequences of being poor in spirit are. The story of the rich man and Lazarus is a picture of this beatitude, painted in life to illustrate powerfully how we will wind up if we do not change, with a codicil that if you are not a beggar in spirit who inherits the kingdom of heaven, you will be cursed, “cursed are the rich who are satisfied for they shall inherit hell”. A poor spirit is going to get to heaven, it says so, but what exactly is a poor spirit, what is a beggarly spirit?

I think that Jesus is talking about the spirit of a man who cannot get enough of his God, *Psa 1:1 Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. Psa 1:2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night*. He is greedy for God and he wants heaven, not as an afterthought but pre-eminently. He wants to be with Christ which is far better than life here. Yet I still see many “Christians” who would do anything to squeeze another minute out of life, because it is more precious to them than heaven and then they would, very reluctantly, leave this mortal coil. Shouldn’t we strengthen one another and assure one another that the things we leave here are in God’s hands? There is no reason to stay a moment longer than is necessary to God.

He is poor in spirit, because he considers that he is unworthy of Christ and his sins constantly rise up in the dark night of the souls to haunt him. He knows he is forgiven but he is humbled by the sacrifice that was made on his behalf and he doubts his worthiness but marvels at the grace of God. His sin glares at him, *Psa 51:3 For I acknowledge my transgressions:* ***and my sin is ever before me****. Psa 51:4 Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest*.

The “poor in spirit” is the state that you must be in to get in to the Kingdom of heaven or Kingdom of God, as it is also called, but in case you were thinking it was all you needed, think again. Poor in spirit you may be, desperate even to

know God and to get to heaven, but heaven's gate has a numbers of locks which you must open among which are,

- *Mat 3:2..... **Repent** ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*
- *Mat 18:3 And said, Verily I say unto you, **Except ye be converted, and become as little children**, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*
- *Joh 3:5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man **be born of water and of the Spirit**, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*
- *Mat 5:20 For I say unto you, That except your **righteousness** shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.*
- *Mat 7:21 Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that **doeth the will of my Father** which is in heaven.*

Jesus is speaking profound words here in the beatitudes and they are to provoke thought, and questions, and hopefully lead to answers in the soul. They are not just sayings without consequences, something you say parrot fashion, until you can say the beatitudes in your sleep and still not know what is being said. Familiarity tends to treat them with contempt.

These words are different from the words Paul uses to the Corinthians, explaining how a Christian is to behave, it is different from the Christians warfare in which he encourage the Christian to take the armour of God. Jesus words take you to a level of inner experience which you should feel if you are a Christian. These are the conditions of the soul and how you should feel if you are truly heaven bound. You cannot deny these things in yourself and still be a child of God. If you have not continuously felt poverty of spirit, mourning, meekness, hungered and thirsted after righteousness, thought about how merciful you are, seen God with a pure heart, etc, then it is very likely that these attributes are not a work in you, so you have to take a good look at your Christianity and apply some corrections.

The beatitudes are a checklist for the soul and Jesus starts His sermon with these words, and He gives them without an explanation, which is a strange thing for a preacher to do. Surely He should be teaching us, giving us the meaning of the words, expounding the text, instead of leaving us in the dark with a conundrum. He throws these words at us like a sower sowing seed, and it hits whatever ground is in your soul. We might be the sort of person who hears and very quickly forgets, or we might take them in for a while and when life gets tough we forget them, and for others, they just grow in our souls as we meditate on them. For most people they are just good words but ask them what they mean and they have little idea.

The beatitudes are practical, like the words of The Lord's Prayer, but being lost in liturgy and empty repetition, they have also lost their meaning. In seeking their meaning, we must think deeply upon them, meditate upon them, and most of all ask Jesus what He meant by them. They may be different for each of us, and that is why there is not one explanation of them given. Poverty of Spirit may be different for each one of us, and I would be extremely wrong to say that it means just one thing. We all may be "poor in spirit", and because we all have different circumstances, we have different meanings, all correct but different.

60..... The Mourners

Preparatory reading: Matthew Chapter 5.

- *Mat 5:4 Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.*
- *Mat 5:4 Blessed are the mourners: for they shall be comforted!* Murdock.
- *Mat 5:4 God blesses those people who grieve. They will find comfort*! CEV.
- *Mat 5:4 Great blessings belong to those who are sad now. God will comfort them*. ERV.

We said last time that these beatitudes are a tool to inspect our souls, but the meaning of them may differ depending on our situation. That is why we suggested that Jesus does not specify exactly what it means to be "poor in spirit". Likewise, here Jesus does not tell us what it is we are mourning, or what we do to become "meek", how we "hunger and thirst after righteousness, or who we shall be "merciful" to. The very thing that we need to do, to comply with these words is missing.

Paul in his ministry to the Corinthians told us exactly what state we were in and how we were to fix it, i.e. partisanship, with the Corinthians factionalizing behind rival leaders, incest, prostitution, celibacy within marriage, Christians married to one another asking about divorce, Christians married to pagans asking about divorce, questions surrounding marriage and remarriage, lawsuits, idolatry, concerns about women praying and prophesying in immodest ways, chaos in worship, with speaking in tongues and competing voices, inequality in the communal meal, denials of the bodily resurrection of Jesus and of Christians, and the collection of a large sum of money to be sent to Jerusalem.

Jesus does not tell a thing about us in the beatitudes, except that we are "blessed" if we do certain things. We do get told what the blessings are, and they are all positive, i.e. the kingdom of heaven, comfort, inheriting the earth, satisfaction, obtaining mercy, seeing God, becoming a child of God, all positive things, showing that all things work together for good to them that love the Lord. But I want to be told what it is I have to do to get them, and I need to know what

is “poor”, “mourning”, “meekness” and so on, to be sure I have the right key to unlock the blessing. Perhaps He didn’t tell me, so that I would ask Him personally? Perhaps He didn’t tell me so that I would wrestle with the verses to get a blessing? Perhaps He didn’t tell me, because I am already in possession of them?

These beatitudes seem to come off of the same press as the Laws of Moses, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not covet, etc. Those Laws did not explain what “murder” was, “what stealing” was, what “coveting” was, and so the needed another set of laws, case laws, to try and explain the 10 commands. They didn’t give all the conditions encountered by each law and so the Jews invented even more laws in the Mishnah, to explain the case laws. We could just end up with law upon law upon law, and still be none the wiser. Thinking about it, the beatitudes were given under the Law of Moses, in the Old Testament, before Christ died, to Jewish people only, so is there a possibility that the beatitudes fade away with dear old Moses. Are the beatitudes a shadow of the Old Testament done away in Christ?

Why were the beatitudes given at so late a stage, the last hour, of the Old Testament, if they were important? Do they have anything to do with the Christians? The presumed importance of the beatitudes is because it is said that they are part of “the new testament” writings, which is obviously untrue as they were given under the Old Testament. It is further interesting that Paul doesn’t reference the ministry of Jesus very much. Only **one** direct **quotation** from Jesus is given in Paul’s writings, *1Co 11:23 For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: 1Co 11:24 And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. 1Co 11:25 After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me*.

There might be other quotations which show a familiarity with the life of Jesus such as, *1Co 15:3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; 1Co 15:4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures*: The extent of Paul’s knowledge is not known, but

Chronological Order Of New Testament	When Written	Canonical Order Codex Sinaiticus	Canonical Order AV
Gospels	James – 50 A.D.	Matthew,	Matthew,
Acts 1-14	First Thessalonians – 52-53.	Mark,	Mark,
James / Galatians	Second Thessalonians – 52-53.	Luke,	Luke,
Acts 15-18.18	Galatians – 55.	John	John
1 Thessalonians	First Corinthians – 57.	Acts	Acts
2 Thessalonians	Second Corinthians – 57.	Romans,	Romans,
Acts 18.19-19	Romans – 57-58.	**Pauline Epistles**:	**Pauline Epistles**:
1 Corinthians	Philippians –	1 Corinthians,	1 Corinthians
2		2 Corinthians,	2 Corinthians
		Galatians,	Galatians,
		Ephesia	Ephesians,
			Philippians
			Colossians
			1

a written knowledge of Jesus in the Gospels was not available. I suppose that while the events of Jesus' life and death were known, they didn't need to record them. They had the inspiration to write them down although they were familiar with the things relating to Jesus, future generations would not have their privilege, so they got it all written down for our benefit.

There is the chronology of events, that is when the events actually happened, and an attempt is made to show this in the chronological Bible. It is an attempt at a timeline of **actual events**. Then there is the chronology of the books that is, when they were **actually written**. So for example, we have The Gospels, detailing Jesus ministry, in a timeline (except perhaps John's Gospel) but these were actually written after Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, and the apostles did not have these as references. It doesn't matter to us now as all these events happened long ago, but it must have been important to those living then, who might not have known the events that you do.

"So what do we make of the beatitudes? The beatitudes state that a group of people usually regarded as afflicted, is actually blessed and those blessed do not have to do anything to attain this blessing. Jesus simply declares that they have already been blessed. Thus the beatitudes are first of all declarations of God's grace. They are not conditions of salvation or roadmaps to earn entry to God's kingdom. The beatitudes describe the character of God's kingdom, but they are not *conditions* of salvation. Jesus does not say, for example, "Only the pure in heart may enter the kingdom of heaven." This is good news because the beatitudes are impossibly hard to fulfill. Given that Jesus says, "Everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart", who could truly be "pure in heart"? If it were not for God's grace, no one would actually be blessed. The beatitudes are not a judgment against all who fail to measure up. Instead, they are a blessing for any who consent to join themselves to God's kingdom as it "comes near.""

The Baptist's first words and Jesus first words are, I think interrelated. John appears and puts down sin, *Mat 3:1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, Mat 3:2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Mat 3:3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Mat 3:4 And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. Mat 3:5 Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, Mat 3:6 And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. Mat 3:7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Mat 3:8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: Mat 3:9 And think not to say within*

yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

The first public words of Jesus are the Beatitudes and in contrast to John's call to repentance, Jesus gives a blessing, *Mat 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Mat 5:4 Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted ,etc,* if you are not doing the things that the Lord asks of you then you had better repent, if you are doing the things the Lord wants, then you are blessed.

If we take the beatitudes at face value, using the words in their most obvious sense, like "poor", "mourn", "meek" and so on, we can come up with a simple explanation of what the beatitudes might mean, and think that we have got the meaning sorted out. But there is something which keeps nibbling at our minds, and we think, "no it can't be that simple", and we take another, deeper look at them and come up with an equally valid meaning, but after a while that explanation doesn't seem enough.

We are studying this beatitude, *Mat 5:4 Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.* At a base level, I might say, what on earth is good going about as a mourner, bearing the thoughts of a lost loved one, what is blessed about having to go through that process even if you are at the last comforted? This is a valley of sorrows anyhow, and we just endure it as good soldiers and it is par for the course.

I am caused to think deeper, and I find that mourning might be for the condition that we are in, downtrodden, oppressed,, captives of another nation, and I am looking for the Messiah, the Christ, to deliver me, *Isa 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; Isa 61:2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God;* ***to comfort all that mourn****; Isa 61:3 To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified. Isa 61:4 And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations*.

Now, I can see this mourning leading to comfort, but it isn't quite personal enough, it is happening to Zion and that is a general observation, that is to Zion, but the beatitude is more personal than that. What is the cause of all this misery, this death which affects every man, this need for a Messiah? Why, it is my sin. That is something to mourn for, something that I am bound with and in and "who shall deliver me from this body of death" but Jesus. Yes, He is the only comfort in

this life, *2Co 1:3 Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; 2Co 1:4 Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. 2Co 1:5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ*.

Mat 5:4 Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted might also find a counterpart with *Psa 30:5 Your anger lasts a little while, but your kindness lasts for a lifetime. At night we may cry, but when morning comes we will celebrate*. CEV. We can put lots of ideas forward giving this verse meaning, and we each of us could have a valid argument, and each of us could be correct, but we will never know Jesus' meaning until we get to glory or do we know it sooner?

In looking back at these beatitudes, we assume that they form part of the DNA that is given to Christians, and with a little tweaking we can meet their requirements. We have the teachings of Jesus and so we try to fit them in to the life that we think the Christian should live, possibly because we are too scared to question their validity. Take the Law of Moses as well and the ten commands. We get them and we look for a place to hang them in our concept of the New Testament, and although they don't fit perfectly, for example, the Sabbath doesn't quite fit our thinking on the Gospel, *Col 2:16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of* ***the sabbath days****: Col 2:17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ*, we tend to keep it anyway, and not really speak of it.

We cobble together a set of teachings and we include everything that seems reasonable into our framework. We include the beatitudes as something relevant to the Christian and yet we have no knowledge whether we have perceived it correctly and understand it, and we also bundle the Law in, yet Moses was mostly rejected by the council of Jerusalem (Acts Chapter 15), we look to our carnal nature and by it we decree a "church", which has little to do with the pattern of the New Testament. Our formulation of Christianity is rather leaky to say the least. Christianity and its forms can be a real pic'n'mix of various beliefs that we gather and prop up to make what is in effect a house of cards. We shall have an attempt at sorting this out in the next chapter.

61..... Have I got the Beatitudes?

Preparatory reading: Matthew Chapter 5

We ended on the thought of which biblical teachings are relevant to our age? I do not get the impression that we are taught the relevance of the teachings in their historical context. This is why we get such a muddle of teachings about the "end

times”, and the restoration of the Jews. That teaching does not examine the literalness or otherwise, of the Old Testament prophets, whether their prophecy has any carry over effect into the New Testament, i.e. whether there is any unfulfilled prophecy. It does not examine what institutions have existed through the ages of men, i.e. the church, because it doesn’t look to the text of the Bible for consistent uses of the word “church”. It does not examine whether carnality and spirituality are two states of those calling themselves Christian, and whether, when referring to Jews, there is only one type, the spiritual Jew. And as this pot of ignorance has more and more ignorance added to the mix, so as to make it an utterly confusing mixture of fact and fiction we grow more confused.

I was reminded of the film, “Life of Brian” which is a bit near the mark but contains some humorous insights,

> What was that? I was too busy talking to Big Nose. I think it was, "Blessed are the cheese makers." What's so special about the cheese makers? Well, obviously, it's not meant to be taken literally. It refers to any manufacturers of dairy products. See, if you hadn't been going on, we'd have heard that, Big Nose. Hey! Say that once more, I'll smash your ****** face in.
>
> Better keep listening. Might be a bit about, "Blessed are the Big Noses." Oh, lay off him. Oh, you're not so bad yourself, Conch Face. Where are you two from, Nose City?
> More banter follows
>
> - Hear that? "Blessed are the Greek."- The Greek? Well, apparently he's going to inherit the earth. .....- Did anyone catch his name?
> More banter follows
>
> - Oh, it's the meek! "Blessed are the meek"! Oh, that's nice, isn't it? I'm glad they're getting something, 'cause they have a hell of a time.

That is how we treat these Beatitudes, with flippancy and a single explanation, no matter how banal, and that is sufficient for us. Any interpretation will do. When you and I start the Christian journey, we get a hand book, the Bible, which is not a completed map of the faith but a series of well planned stories and events, which we link together in various ways. It is certainly not a completed map of the faith, the way to eternal life, because that would show a definitive route, but instead it is a “jig saw” of pieces of maps that we are left to fit together, and we fit them together differently, and that is why we have so much variation of the faith. Only by fitting the fragments of the maps together in the right sequence do we come to the true knowledge of the faith in Jesus.

Jesus is one element of that faith and we try to fit Him in and get to know Him. The portion of the map He makes up is critical to understanding the whole. It is a fragment that also continually appears to change as we look at it. When we first came to Him for forgiveness, He appeared to us as a man, but as we looked deeper and deeper at His character, we saw that He was God, and more than that He was the Creator, and on looking further we saw Him as Jehovah Jesus. He changed before our eyes into someone greater than we ever expected, and that in turn, when fed back into Scriptures, altered our understanding of them also.

What is the role of Jesus? The appearance of Jesus in the so called "inter-testamental period" which I prefer to call the transitional period, the transition of the earthy to the heavenly, is the nexus of the relationships with man and a return to Adam's relationship, *Luk 9:30 And, behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah. Luk 9:31 Appearing in glory, they spoke of His exodus, which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem*. LITV..... *1Co 15:22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive*.

This occurs when He comes to bring the curtain down, literally, upon the Old Testament. The incarnation as a baby in Bethlehem, was the introduction of He who was pre-existent*, Mic 5:2*
And thou Bethlehem Ephrata, art a little one among the thousands of Juda, out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be the ruler in Israel: ***and his going forth is from the beginning, from the days of eternity***. In entering this reality and coming to the nation of Jews, He was not recognised, as John says, *Joh 1:10 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and* ***the world knew him not. Joh 1:11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not****. Joh 1:12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name*: His own were of course the nation of Israel, *Mat 15:23 But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. Mat 15:24 But he answered and said****, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel***.

I take it that everything that He said, and His mighty works, were directed to Israel, *Mat 11:20* ***Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not:*** *Mat 11:21 Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Mat 11:22 But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. Mat 11:23 And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. Mat 11:24 But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee*.

Jesus was the King of the Jews, and even The Magi came from the east to worship Him, *Mat 2:2 Saying,* ***Where is he that is born King of the Jews****? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him*. But the hard hearted Jews mostly rejected Him, except for what we might call, a remnant of the people. In coming to His people, those from the beginning, those from the lineage of Abraham, through to the establishment of the nation of Israel, He had a singular purpose, *Mat 1:21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS:* ***for he shall save his people from their sins****.* That is, save them from the consequences of their sin.

This was the Mission of Jesus, a salvage and rescue mission of an ancient people, the Jews, who had lost their way, who had fallen under the spell of a great leader Moses, and who had elevated him above God, *Joh 5:42 but I do know that none of you love God. Joh 5:43 I have come with my Father's authority, and you have not welcomed me. But you will welcome people who come on their own. Joh 5:44 How could you possibly believe? You like to have your friends praise you, and* ***you don't care about praise that the only God can give****! Joh 5:45 Don't think that I will be the one to accuse you to the Father. You have put your hope in Moses, yet he is the very one who will accuse you. Joh 5:46* ***Moses wrote about me, and if you had believed Moses, you would have believed me****. Joh 5:47 But if you don't believe what Moses wrote, how can you believe what I say?* CEV.

This is the setting of the Beatitudes, **which comes before the people heard and understood that Jesus would die for them**. We must blank our minds to the death of Jesus if we are to get into the mindset of the Jews who heard this teaching of the Beatitudes. The Jews did not know about Jesus coming death and it took His disciples by surprise. The Jews had a current set of laws which prescribed their religion, which told them what things they could do that were right and good in society, the sacrifices and offering that were necessary for transgressing those laws. They had the big occasions which they celebrated with much rejoicing, Pesach (Passover), Shavuot (the Feast of Weeks), and Sukkot (the Feast of Booths), which came before the Day of Atonement. Amidst the yearly round of this established worship, came Jesus, with His message that the Jews “could do better”, words which I am sure we have all received on our school reports at some time.

Jesus comes on the scene to a mixed welcome. Among the people there was “gladness”, *Luk 8:40 And it came to pass, that, when Jesus was returned,* ***the people gladly received him****: for they were all waiting for him*.

Jesus appeared to be muscling in on the established form of religion and its leaders, you know, the ones who have been around for so long, even their clothes look out of date. He appeared to have some things to say about the way they did things in His Sermon on the Mount, *Mat 5:38 Ye have heard that it hath*

been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: Mat 5:39 But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. They didn't like that, being told that they had got it wrong, and so to shore up their falsehood, they decided to kill Jesus, *Joh 11:49 And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, Joh 11:50 Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. Joh 11:51 And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation.*

The divided nature of the nation caused considerable contention as Jesus put out His teaching, but there was not one Gentile in His sights as He poured His corrections over the Promised Land, and His teaching was to the Jews. The Gentiles, the step-children of the ministry of Christ, had to wait in the wings, for their time was coming. The Great Sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, was to a Jewish audience, and it opens with The Beatitudes, showing that at least some were blessed with their attitudes, the Be-Attitudes.

All of these Beatitudes however, are fulfilled in the lives of Christians when we come to the other side of the cross, when we enter the New Covenant with Jesus, when Jew and Gentile join hands in proclaiming the Gospel of Christ. The Beatitudes are not something we do, but something which is done for us, by the merits of Jesus. You don't work to produce the Beatitudes, you ask Jesus for them, just as you don't work for His righteousness, you ask Him for it, *Php 3:9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:* The outcomes for the Beatitudes are the blessings of,

- *The kingdom of heaven.*
- *the blessing of Comfort*
- *the blessing of Inheritance*
- *the blessing of Righteousness*
- *the blessing of Mercy.*
- *the blessing of a Sight of God*
- *the blessing of Adoption (the children of God)*

How do I get to the kingdom of heaven? It is by Jesus alone, *Heb 12:22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and* ***unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem****, and to an innumerable company of angels, Heb 12:23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, Heb 12:24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.*

I expect you were thinking that I would use a proof text from Jesus' ministry, like, *Joh 3:3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Joh 3:4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Joh 3:5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God*. I did not use it, although I think that it applies in all ages, because the early Christians did not get this Gospel until quite a few years after Jesus death and resurrection, so I chose another teaching. John's Gospel was not in circulation until about 80 BC, 50 years after Jesus ministry.

Comfort for us is through Jesus, *2Co 1:3 Praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! The Father is a merciful God, who always gives us comfort. 2Co 1:4 He comforts us when we are in trouble, so that we can share that same comfort with others in trouble. 2Co 1:5* ***We share in the terrible sufferings of Christ, but also in the wonderful comfort he gives.*** CEV. We are given this token of peace by Christ.

The inheritance of the earth, was given to the Old Testament saints as a token of heaven. In the Old Testament, they looked to inherit the earth, but in the New Testament they look to heaven, *Eph 1:12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. Eph 1:13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, Eph 1:14* ***who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory***.ESV…….*Act 20:32 And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and* ***to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified****.*

The righteousness which is ours, comes to us only by Christ, *Php 3:8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, Php 3:9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but* ***that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:*** *Php 3:10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; Php 3:11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead*.

We receive mercy as a gift from Him, *Rom 9:22 What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: Rom 9:23 And that* ***he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory****, Rom 9:24 Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?*

"Seeing" God is by the process of doing good, *3Jn 1:11 Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.* The more that we walk in the light the more we see, *1Jn 1:5 This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 1Jn 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: 1Jn 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*

We receive the adoption by Jesus, making us His children, *Rom 8:15 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. Rom 8:16 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: Rom 8:17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.*

To sum up Jesus and the Beatitudes, Jesus is saying that**, "You know Me, that's what the Beatitudes are all about, knowing Me"**. And in answer to the question, "Have I got the Beatitudes?" Yes, if you are a Christian, following Christ, **you most certainly have.**

62..... Incompatibility Between Christ and Carnality

Preparatory reading: Romans Chapter 11

I am inserting this ministry as a codicil to the study on the Beatitudes, which as you recall I said were already fulfilled in the life Christians of the New Testament period. I think that a bit more explanation is required. Clearly I said that there was nothing that you could do, to work, to get by merit, because the blessings of Christ are all of Grace, *Rom 11:5 Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. Rom 11:6* ***And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace****. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work*.

The election, the choice of you by God, is all of Grace and not one thing that you do, not one work, makes you acceptable, or else it is no more of grace. You do not have to "do" anything to get the Lord's blessing, the blessings of the Beatitudes, which are given to God's people out of His Grace, as a King that bestows His favours upon the wretched poor. You do though have to live up to Christ's claim on you.

So what are the purposes of the commands of God, the rules that Paul lays down in Corinthians, which we have covered if it is all of Grace, surely Paul is wrong to

try to get us to work to correct what is wrong with us, to do the Law? *Gal 3:21 Does the Law disagree with God's promises? No, it doesn't! If any law could give life to us, we could become acceptable to God by obeying that law. Gal 3:22 But the Scriptures say that sin controls everyone,* ***so that God's promises will be for anyone who has faith in Jesus Christ.*** *Gal 3:23 The Law controlled us and kept us under its power until the time came when we would have faith*. CEV.

So it is by faith, "***so that God's promises will be for anyone who has faith in Jesus Christ"***, and if you have faith in Christ you will do the things that Christ wants, *Rom 4:16 Everything depends on having faith in God, so that God's promise is assured by his great kindness. This promise isn't only for Abraham's descendants who have the Law. It is for all who are Abraham's descendants because they have faith, just as he did. Abraham is the ancestor of us all*. And **you are also saved by this Grace**, *Eph 2:6 God raised us from death to life with Christ Jesus, and he has given us a place beside Christ in heaven. Eph 2:7 God did this so that in the future world he could show how truly good and kind he is to us because of what Christ Jesus has done. Eph 2:8 You were saved by faith in God, who treats us much better than we deserve. This is God's gift to you, and not anything you have done on your own. Eph 2:9 It isn't something you have earned, so there is nothing you can brag about*. CEV.

We see the Beatitudes as **not** something that we have to work to get, they are given by Grace, but more as a mirror to see ourselves as we are and as we shall be. But what about those persons who neglect the teachings of Christ, who fall short of the teachings of Christ, who made a profession of being saved but did not go on with Christ, where do these persons fit into the grand scheme of things? They say they are "saved" but are they?

There is much debate about "carnal Christians" and whether you should use that term to describe the people that I have been talking about. Some say that they are not Christians and should be distinguished from "real" Christians, because they are not followers of Christ. Paul calls the young in faith believers "carnal", fleshly = σαρκικός, *1Co 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto* ***spiritual****, but as unto* ***carnal****, even as unto* ***babes in Christ****.1Co 3:2 I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able*.

He addresses them as carnal, σαρκικός, as opposed to spiritual, πνευματικός. Their carnality is seen in opposition to spirituality, earthly as opposed to heavenly, fleshly as opposed to the spiritual nature. You will notice, however, that the people are still "**in Christ**" albeit babes in Christ. So it is easy to see how the term "carnal Christian" came to be used. Unfortunately the word "Christian" is used as a concrete noun, whereas it perhaps should be used as an abstract noun. A **concrete noun** refers to a physical object in the real world,

such as a dog, a ball, or an ice cream cone. An **abstract noun** refers to an idea or concept that does not exist in the real world and cannot be touched, like freedom, sadness, or permission. When you use the word Christian how are you using it, concretely or abstractly?

Is the term Christian, concrete or is it abstract? We have to go to the definition of Christian, when it was first used, to get a sense of its meaning, *Act 11:26 And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And* ***the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch***. The term was applied to the disciples, and the term had a concrete meaning, it was the name of a certain class of people. A group of people "who were called Christians" and whether they were saved or true believers is not said. When we start arguing about the qualities which make Christians we start to use the abstract sense of the word.

This became a term to classify certain people, "Christians", as opposed to "Jews", but we know the term Jew covered a wide range of people, even as we have seen in today's world. Paul makes the distinction between Jews who are outward Jews, and Jews who have the Spiritual, inward qualities, *Rom 2:28 Just because you live like a Jew and are circumcised* ***doesn't make you a real Jew****. Rom 2:29 To be a real Jew you must obey the Law. True circumcision is something that happens deep in your heart, not something done to your body. And besides, you should want praise from God and not from humans*. CEV. He is defining a Jew concretely, outwardly, and also abstractly, inwardly. I take the Christian to have the same two senses, outward Christians and inward Christians. Those who call themselves Christians are not necessarily inward Christians.

Therefore, we might call all people who say they are "disciples" of Christ, Christian, like the Corinthians, like the Church of England, the Jehovah's Witnesses and so on, but because we have not defined "disciple", "***the disciples were called Christians***", we have not got to the heart of the matter. The carnal babies in Christ could call themselves Christians, because they were learners, disciple = μαθητής = learners. If they lapsed in their following Christ, they would have ceased to be learners, and ceased to be true Christians. And here is the thing which really makes you a Christian, it is because you follow Christ, *Php 3:12 Not as though I had already attained, or were already perfect:* ***but I follow after, if I may by any means apprehend, wherein I am also apprehended by Christ Jesus****. Php 3:13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended. But one thing I do: Forgetting the things that are behind and stretching forth myself to those that are before, Php 3:14 I press towards the mark, to the prize of the supernal vocation of God in Christ Jesus*. DRB.

Let us consider the state of man with respect to the "word" of God, as it unfolds in the Parable of the Sower", *Mat 13:18 Hear ye therefore the parable of the*

sower. Mat 13:19 When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. Mat 13:20 But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Mat 13:21 Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. Mat 13:22 He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. Mat 13:23 But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

In this story of the sower, all kinds of people are laid before us, Ministers of the Gospel, Prophets, Teachers, Evangelists, all people who attend church, boys, girls, men, women, every creature which comes under the sound of God's word. Thus there is a difference between the **Parable of the Weeds**, which deals with the whole World of mankind, and we shall come to that. The **Parable of the Sower**, I say again is about those that hear the word.

They do not all have the same outcome from hearing the word. There is a lack of understanding of the word which leads to rejection, disobedience to the word before other things take over and a falling away occurs and there are those who produce fruit as a result of hearing the word. You could not tell from the start of their journey the difference between them. Only as they go on do we begin to see a different attitude to the word. The word has not changed but what the people are, what is going on inside them, is being revealed.

I have seen people who made a profession of faith, got baptised, went to church, did all the things that you expect of a Christian, were a part of the brotherhood of faith, only to lapse back into the world and lose all interest in Christianity. Yet I was happy to call then Christians, initially. I have seen those who have cast Christianity off for a season, the faith, only for them to hear the word later and return, broken but now a zealous Christian. I have seen zealous Christians grow cold and indifferent to the things of Christ yet still hold on to the term Christian, to describe themselves. I have seen men who twist the word that is sown, to mean what it does not mean and they still call themselves Christian, even Christian ministers who do not believe Christ. The word Christian can have so many meanings to people, yet in all of this we must see that it is not what you call yourself which makes you a Christian, but whether, ultimately, you and I get into the Kingdom of Heaven. That is what counts.

The companion parable, the next parable of the weeds, or tares, goes a little further in explaining what has happened, *Mat 13:36 After Jesus left the crowd and went inside, his disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the story*

about the weeds in the wheat field." Mat 13:37 Jesus answered: The one who scattered the good seed is the Son of Man. Mat 13:38 The field is the world, and the good seeds are the people who belong to the kingdom. The weed seeds are those who belong to the evil one, Mat 13:39 and the one who scattered them is the devil. The harvest is the end of time, and angels are the ones who bring in the harvest. Mat 13:40 Weeds are gathered and burned. That's how it will be at the end of time. Mat 13:41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will gather from his kingdom everyone who does wrong or causes others to sin. Mat 13:42 Then he will throw them into a flaming furnace, where people will cry and grit their teeth in pain. Mat 13:43 But everyone who has done right will shine like the sun in their Father's kingdom. If you have ears, pay attention! CEV.

It says that there are only two types of people in the world, despite having shown there were sub-groups of hearers of the word, there are in fact only two distinct groups. Those who are sown by satan and those who are sown by Christ. Calling yourself a Christian, a committed Christian, a carnal Christian, a cultural Christian, calling yourself what you like, does not count for a thing, and does not make it so. You can do a self-assessment, write yourself up in large letters, call yourself the grand wizard of the church of England, but what you think you are, counts for nothing. It is what God says, and whether you “have done right” that really counts, and for us, whether we get into the Kingdom.

Carnality, the fleshly state of fallen man, is the state of sin, *Rom 8:5 For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. Rom 8:6 For* ***to be carnally minded is death****; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Rom 8:7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. Rom 8:8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. Rom 8:9 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*. Paul tells the Corinthians that they are carnal, and he addresses those who have made a profession of faith, as a warning. If they continue like that, they will eventually perish. They will be the ones who fall on stony ground, they will fall by the wayside if they continue to be carnal.

We all go through growth in the faith at different rates, but if we are on track for the Heavenly Kingdom, we will exhibit certain qualities, not the least of which is complying with the requests of Christ. The person who does not comply will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The person who is carnal, will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The Beatitudes show the compliance to the qualities that are commensurate for entrants to the Kingdom.

We may know very little about what is required to enter when we first come to Christ. We make some confession of being saved, but that is the first step on the rungs of the ladder. There are many more to climb, but we have the Bible as a

guide as to which of the steps to take. Jesus has given us The Beatitudes, the things we should be doing if we are truly His. We do not balk at His teachings, *Mat 11:29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. Mat 11:30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*.

You and I are His sheep because we hear him, *Joh 10:7 Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. Joh 10:8 All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. Joh 10:9 I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture*.

It is so important to the person seeking Christ, that he gets it right, that he will spend time and effort in seeking for the narrow way. It is something we neglect at our peril. Just because it "feels right", suits you, has other people following a certain path, because they have always done it that way, because they have traditions, because they have been schooled in it, because there are worldly wise men who say "this is the way", because they follow the intellectuals who they think can see the way, does not make them right. Following the way of carnality, the way of the flesh is totally against the way of Christ.

What makes you right and the way right, is Jesus, and nothing else, *Joh 14:6 Jesus saith unto him, **I am the way, the truth, and the life**: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me*.

63..... From Glory to Glory

Preparatory reading: Philippians Chapter 2

I continue to look at what is required of a person who professes faith in Jesus, *Php 2:12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling**. Php 2:13 **For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure***.

Philippians was written 30 years after Jesus death and before the Gospels were circulated, when Judaism was fresh in the minds of the ex-Jewish dominated New Testament assembly, and so I imagine the examples given in the Law of Moses were generally the way that sin was dealt with and salvation pursued, so that your behaviour was modified by works. "Thou shalt not do this or that....." et cetera, and rather like those Victorian Institutions, you have reminders of your duty to God, hanging in frames upon the wall, things like "thou shalt love the Lord thy God", "God sees all", and "The soul that sins shall die". And that is what

brings Christianity into a hard miserable task, always having to look over your shoulder, wondering if you had got things right, and it makes the task of working out your salvation a wretched task.

It seems to me that we work out our salvation by ourselves as a matter of choice, rather than having God present while we are working it out, and we ask each other how to do it and we get books on it, and try all sorts of remedies for a sick soul. We spend hours thinking up ways in which we can “work it out”, but never really take the advice of the Bible, *Heb 12:1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Heb 12:2* ***Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith****; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God*.

Yes it is as simple as that, “***Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith***". That is what Charles Spurgeon did on that snowy day January 6, 1850.

> 15-year-old Charles Spurgeon was trudging up Hythe Hill in Colchester, on his way to church. When the blizzard prevented him from going further, he turned the corner and made his way into a small Primitive Methodist Church on Artillery Street. He recounted the story hundreds of time, each time a bit differently. But here is one of his most vivid recollections:
>
> I sometimes think I might have been in darkness and despair now, had it not been for the goodness of God in sending a snowstorm one Sunday morning, when I was going to a place of worship. When I could go no further, I turned down a court and came to a little Primitive Methodist Chapel. In that chapel there might be a dozen or fifteen people. The minister did not come that morning: snowed up, I suppose. A poor man, a shoemaker, a tailor, or something of that sort, went up into the pulpit to preach. He was obliged to stick to his text, for the simple reason that he had nothing else to say. The text was, ‘Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth’ [Isa 45:22]. He did not even pronounce the words rightly, but that did not matter. There was, I thought, a glimpse of hope for me in the text.
>
> He began thus: ‘My dear friends, this is a very simple text indeed. It says, “Look.” Now that does not take a deal of effort. It ain’t lifting your foot or your finger; it is just “look.” Well, a man need not go to college to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man need not be worth a thousand a year to look. Anyone can look; a

> child can look. But this is what the text says. Then it says, “Look unto Me.” ‘Ay,’ said he, in broad Essex, ‘many of ye are looking to yourselves. No use looking there. You’ll never find comfort in yourselves.’ Then the good man followed up his text in this way: ‘Look unto Me: I am sweating great drops of blood. Look unto Me; I am hanging on the Cross. Look: I am dead and buried. Look unto Me; I rise again. Look unto Me; I ascend; I am sitting at the Father’s right hand. O, look to Me! Look to Me!’
>
> When he had got about that length, and managed to spin out ten minutes, he was at the length of his tether. Then he looked at me under the gallery, and I daresay, with so few present, he knew me to be a stranger. He then said, ‘Young man, you look very miserable.’ Well, I did; but I had not been accustomed to have remarks made on my personal appearance from the pulpit before. However, it was a good blow struck.
>
> He continued: ‘And you will always be miserable—miserable in life and miserable in death—if you do not obey my text. But if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved.’ Then he shouted, as only a Primitive Methodist can, ‘Young man, look to Jesus Christ.’ There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun; and I could have risen that moment and sung with the most enthusiastic of them of the Precious Blood of Christ.”

How much easier it is to look at the person of Jesus than muddle around trying to solve your own problems. The Scripture says, “***work out your own salvation with fear and trembling***. ***For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure***.” When we look to Him, we see the answer to all of our problems, and they are problems no longer, *2Co 3:18 And all of us, with faces uncovered, because we continue to reflect like mirrors the splendor of the Lord, are being transformed into likeness to Him, **from one degree of splendor to another**, since it comes from the Lord who is the Spirit*. Williams. This is an excellent expansion of the verse. Moses covered his face because he did not want the children of Israel to see the fading glory he had in the presence of God. But we, with uncovered faces, reflect the transformation, literally the metamorphosis, as we reflect His glory. The “working out your salvation” is by looking at him, *2Co 3:18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord*.

Let’s take a few paces back because we presume that we are in a position to work out our salvation. We haven’t yet seen how we get into the position of being able to work out our salvation. We know Christ died for sin, *Rom 5:8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ*

died for us. That is a statement of fact but it has not got my name written in it, it does not say, *Rom 5:8 But God demonstrates his love toward **Mike**, in that, while he was a sinner, Christ died for him*. How do I get that, how does it become personal to me?

Is it as simple as some say, "In (Rom 10:13), it says, "For whosoever shall call upon the Lord shall be saved." "Calling" in this verse is equal to praying. You are praying a prayer that many call a "sinner's prayer." It is simply a way for you to cry out to Jesus (the "Lord") in prayer, and surrender your life to Him, asking Him to save you from the penalty of your sins, and give you a new life". It could be, although that is the first step on the road to life, because more is required by you. You are not given this without entering into His death on the cross, by actively participating in His death, *Gal 2:20 **I am crucified with Christ**: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me*.

If I want the benefits of Christ's death, I must be prepared to go to the cross with Him, and for His death to have value in my life, I must be prepared to die for Him and with Him, *Mat 16:24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and **follow me**. Mat 16:25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it*. I must have that genuine desire to want Christ above all things in this world and I show this by dying to self, *2Co 4:10 Always bearing about in our body the mortification = **νέκρωσις** of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies*.

We have certainly entered a deeper relationship than is gained by "coming to Jesus for forgiveness". Now we go on with Him, now I can participate in the hope, *Rom 8:1 There is therefore now **no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus**, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Rom 8:2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death*. But if I am free, I will not continue in that **carnality** which I have already spoken of, *Rom 8:4 That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Rom 8:5 For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. Rom 8:6 For **to be carnally minded is death**; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Rom 8:7 Because **the carnal mind is enmity against God**: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. Rom 8:8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. Rom 8:9 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*.

I am saved if I reckon myself dead as far as sin is concerned, and I see this by my hatred of sin, and this is the sign that Christ is in me, *Rom 8:10 And if Christ*

be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. Rom 8:11 But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. Rom 8:12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. Rom 8:13 For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye ***through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live***.

I am crucified with Christ, *Rom 6:6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin*. Mortification, (θανατόω), deadening of the body by the Spirit, achieves this. Put another way, *Eph 4:22 That ye* ***put off concerning the former conversation (conduct) the old man****, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts*;..... *Col 3:9 Lie not one to another, seeing that* ***ye have put off the old man*** *with his deeds (πρᾶξις).* We put away the old nature, the works of the flesh, *Gal 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Gal 5:20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Gal 5:21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past,* ***that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God****. Gal 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Gal 5:23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. Gal 5:24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts*.

Then we “put on” the new, *Eph 4:24 And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.....Col 3:10 And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him*. That is the image we are translated into, *2Co 4:10 Always bearing about in our body the mortification =* ***νέκρωσις*** *of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies*.

We look to Jesus to finish the faith, our faith, *Heb 12:2 Looking unto* ***Jesus the author and finisher of our faith****; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God*.

Just by looking at Him? That is what it says. When you are looking at Jesus you cannot see the world, there He is in all His glory, just like when He appeared to Moses, outshining everything, leaving His glory shining upon Moses face. Being with Jesus shows, *Act 4:13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them,* ***that they had been with Jesus***. The antidote to the world is a good dose of heaven. The antidote to sinful behaviour encouraged by satan, is to keep your eye firmly upon Jesus and your heart bound to His

heart. The antidote to the world's companions, who will only bring you down in grief and sadness, is Jesus and His companions. "Look" as that beloved old preacher said, "Look." Now that does not take a deal of effort. It ain't lifting your foot or your finger; it is just "look." You look, on your own, and you alone make the decision to follow Jesus.

And if you still argue against that, well, you're up against the sovereignty of God, *Rom 9:19 Someone may ask, "How can God blame us, if he makes us behave in the way he wants us to?" Rom 9:20 But, my friend, I ask, "Who do you think you are to question God? Does the clay have the right to ask the potter why he shaped it the way he did? Rom 9:21 Doesn't a potter have the right to make a fancy bowl and a plain bowl out of the same lump of clay?" Rom 9:22 God wanted to show his anger and reveal his power against everyone who deserved to be destroyed. But instead, he patiently put up with them. Rom 9:23 He did this by showing how glorious he is when he has pity on the people he has chosen to share in his glory. Rom 9:24 Whether Jews or Gentiles, we are those chosen ones*. CEV.

64..... Adam and Christ

Preparatory reading: John Chapter 1 and 1 Corinthians Chapter 15.

Adam and Jesus form the two end stops of humanity, the first Adam and the last Adam, which is not lost on the Apostle Paul, *1Co 15:45 And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit*. Adam brought death into the world and that death passed to all of us and it continues to work in our lives whether we are a believer or not and we are all going to die. Many will say that it is a natural process that comes with time and console themselves with this illusion. But this is a theme in the Bible. The process of death is not without meaning or consequences, it has lasting eternal consequences, and for this reason Jesus came, that we might find Him, the last Adam.

It took me some time to get to this point, one of the reasons being, it was not taught to me in the "church" I was going to, mind you a lot was not being taught in the church that I was going to, and that is not surprising seeing they were catering for so many different "ages" in the faith. No programme of learning was forthcoming and I assumed that everybody who had made a commitment to Christ was considered "saved" and you could learn at your own pace or not, but as long as you had made that commitment, you were alright. Well, it seemed important to me, and as a very important subject it is why I am including it early on in this study.

Before I talk about the first Adam, I must talk about his Maker, who we call variously, God, the Almighty, the Ruler of the universe and by many other names, and none of them brings Him closer to us, because none of us have much of a clue just what that Name signifies. It does not have any meaning that I can relate to. But I can relate to Jesus as a man, God who came down in the flesh with the infirmities of the flesh (but sinless) and this is the mystery, *Col 1:26 For ages and ages this message was kept secret from everyone, but now it has been explained to God's people. Col 1:27 God did this because he wanted you Gentiles to understand his wonderful and glorious mystery. And the mystery is that Christ lives in you, and he is your hope of sharing in God's glory*. He is Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament and the Jesus the God of the New Testament, one and the same person, Jehovah who became Jesus in the flesh. That is quite a concept to grasp and we shall return to it later.

This seems unorthodox, but really it is not, particularly in the face of unbelieving criticism. Look at this statement from the **Biologos** website, whose first article of belief states, “We believe the Bible is the inspired and authoritative word of God. By the Holy Spirit it is the “living and active” means through which God speaks to the church today, bearing witness to God’s Son, Jesus, as the divine Logos, or Word of God.” So far so good you may say and that seems to be fairly orthodox, but look at how they interpret those words, for it then states in an article about death that,

> Without question, death has accompanied life since it first appeared on this planet millions of years ago, long before humans existed (sic!). The fossil record testifies to this fact. All death cannot be the result of human sinfulness. Although sin undoubtedly causes a great deal of suffering and premature death, substantial biblical evidence indicates that death—even human death—is simply part of the present creation and not the result of sin. In short, the present world is different from the world to come, and the Bible speaks of death in surprising ways, not all of them negative.

When you have such remarks as “All death cannot be the result of human sinfulness”, you are dealing with the devil’s experts whose aim is to mislead you, flying in the face of Scripture, *Rom 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;* **and**, *Rom 8:19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. Rom 8:20* ***For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope*** *Rom 8:21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. Rom 8:22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. Rom 8:23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.* ERB. You know that you are not dealing with a

Christian website when you read this drivel, and in spite of what it says of itself, you are dealing with the deceits of satan. As he said early on in the Bible, “yea hath God said?”

How similar is the Biologos claim to that of satan, *Gen 3:4 And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die*, and if you follow the devil’s teaching you will be misled to your own destruction. Do they even believe in Eve or the devil as historical persons? This is the problem Christianity has always faced since the devil made that remark recorded in Genesis, and there will always be men who challenge what God has said.

Jesus made man and all things, and that you must believe, despite the mutterings of man’s philosophy, *Joh 1:1* ***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God****, and the Word was God. Joh 1:2 The same was in the beginning with God. Joh 1:3* ***All things were made by him****; and without him was not any thing made that was made. Joh 1:4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men. Joh 1:5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.* Do you see what that is saying? The Word, Jesus, made everything, and what it says of Jesus is attributed to Jehovah of the Old Testament. I shall call Him Jehovah Jesus to avoid separating Him from the Godhead.

There is our starting point, the Creation, *Joh 1:3 Through him God made all things; not one thing in all creation was made without him*. GNB. That explains how we got here and it was by a direct creation not by a process, *Gen 1:26 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. Gen 1:27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them*. God did not make a monkey and modify him over time, He made him in his image, “*In him was life; and the life was the light of men.”* That image was Jesus.

That creation is history not mythology, and you should settle this point early on as you read the Bible. It does not start with mythology and make a transition to factual history after 11 Chapters of Genesis. It is all history, from end to end, not mythology turning into fact and back to mythology again when you don’t understand it. You may find it hard to accept this after your secular unbelieving education, which puts forward a world view of an unbeliever, but the Bible puts forward an alternative world view of the believer, and it is in harmony with what you see in the world.

God made us in our entirety, *Psa 139:13 You are the one who put me together inside my mother's body, Psa 139:14 and I praise you because of the wonderful way you created me. Everything you do is marvelous! Of this I have no*

doubt. We consist of the flesh and the spirit, *Joh 3:5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Joh 3:6* ***That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spiri****t*. We seem to have two lives, one physical and the other spiritual and they coexist together.

This seems very strange, but we do have a physical body consisting of all the parts necessary to exists in this world, and there is built upon it, this substrate, a spiritual life, which relates to the physical, yet is independent from it and according to the Scripture, *Ecc 12:7 Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.* So having been made body and spirit, the body can be dissolved and the spirit lives on, in fact it lives forever. The body is raised at the resurrection but we do not know what form it will take, *1Co 15:35 But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? 1Co 15:36 Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: 1Co 15:37 And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: 1Co 15:38 But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body*.

As Adam represents our physical nature, and in him we die, so then Christ Jesus represents our spiritual nature, and in Him we live. We see the truth emerging of a dualism, as one has put it, “the two natures in the child of God”, and the two realities we live in, *Gal 4:21 Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? Gal 4:22 For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. Gal 4:23* ***But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise.*** *Gal 4:24 Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. Gal 4:25 For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to* ***Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage*** *with her children. Gal 4:26 But* ***Jerusalem which is above is free,*** *which is the mother of us all.* There are two Jerusalem’s, one earthly and one heavenly.

There is in scripture an earthly counterpart to the spiritual reality in heaven, *1Co 15:45 And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. 1Co 15:46 Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. 1Co 15:47 The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. 1Co 15:48 As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. 1Co 15:49* ***And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly***.

The sin of Adam was the event which threw the world into confusion and it was the righteousness of Christ Jesus which brings us back to reality. When we go through the Old Testament, we shall see the redeeming figure of Christ, overshadowing events until He reveals Himself more fully in the New Testament, and that the salvation that Jesus offers is the same to the Old Testament saints as the New Testament saints, *Rom 4:16 Everything depends on having faith in God, so that God's promise is assured by his great kindness.* ***This promise isn't only for Abraham's descendants who have the Law. It is for all who are Abraham's descendants because they have faith, just as he did. Abraham is the ancestor of us all****. Rom 4:17 The Scriptures say that Abraham would become the ancestor of many nations. This promise was made to Abraham because he had faith in God, who raises the dead to life and creates new things*. CEV. The grace of Christ is the same all the way through the Bible, from beginning to end.

That is why we shall start with Abraham and proceed to examine how Jesus appears in the Old Testament. We are not told by modern evangelists to start in the Old Testament when we are seeking Christ, but do you read any book by opening it half way through and missing vital information on the plot? Do you suddenly read of characters and events of which you have no knowledge? Of course not, but this is the way that Scripture is introduced, and as a result the Old Testament becomes a largely redundant piece of writing, a sort of “junk DNA”, a scaffold which the New Testament is built upon and then forgotten and you find no use for it.

Further, if you take up the book half way through, and draw some conclusions on the outcome, some inferences, say about how the next events will happen, and you haven’t even worked out what was said and done earlier in the book, because you were too lazy to find out, you may have missed the evidence, and your conclusions will be wrong. Many Christians become dogmatic about things for which they do not have the slightest evidence, and there is no excuse for sloppy exegesis, the explanation of Scripture.

One of the most important texts of the Scripture is, *Luk 24:27 And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them* ***in all the scriptures the things concerning himself***. We may know many of the Scriptures but this tells us something different. After all Jesus’ ministry, after all the miracles, all the healings, all the disputes with gainsayers, all the wonders that the disciples had seen, in all of this, **they had not seen Jesus in the Scriptures**.

When you are seeking Jesus, seeking to know of Him, trying to find out the sort of person He is, what the compass of His power is, how He might forgive you, how you are saved, how you develop a relationship with Him, you seldom if ever do it on your own. Somewhere along the line a “helpful” Christian will intervene, or a church will take over and guide you, or particular denominational books will

take over and replace your independent study, and before long, your relationship with Christ has been designed for you. You are no longer searching for Him, and He is no longer someone your soul loves, but another god who man has made, unlike the Shullamite who looks for her love and finds him, *Son 3:3 The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth? Son 3:4 It was but a little that I passed from them,* ***but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go****, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me. Son 3:5 I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please*.

You must find HIM for yourself, *Luk 9:23 And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me*. You must not be distracted from your task by men and you must prove everything that is said by the word of God, for if it is not the word of God, you are being led by the false prophet. There may also be well meaning people who will make rules that you should follow, but if Jesus did not give the rules, you are under no obligation to do them. Take these well meaning Baptists (Restricted Baptists), who give rules for membership and church government, they write in their handbook (Articles of faith and rules 2008 Published by the Trustees of The Gospel Standard Aid and Poor Relief Society),

> Admittance into church membership
> Any person desiring to become a member of this church, must first be interviewed by the pastor (if there be one) and deacons, who, if in their judgment the candidate is suitable for membership, shall duly bring the matter before the church. A copy of the church’s Articles of Faith and Rules to be given to each candidate for their instruction
>
> The pastorate. No minister shall be appointed as pastor until he has supplied at least months on probation, and unless there be in favour at least two-thirds (three-fifths) of the members present and voting at a church meeting duly convened for this particular purpose (see rules 13-15); nor shall any minister be invited to supply on probation without a like majority, also at a duly convened meeting
>
> Discipline note. – The object of discipline in the Church of Christ is (1) The vindication of the truth; (2) The restoration of any offending brother. Any member of this church knowingly receiving the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper with any church not of the same faith and order with ourselves, shall be reproved; and should the offence be repeated, be withdrawn from.

> Any member relating to any other person, not a member, what has been said or done at any church meeting, shall be liable, according to the judgment of the pastor and deacons, to be brought before the church to be dealt with.

Now where in God's word, do you ever get laws and sanctions like that? Only in a man-made church does this exist, with its extra scriptural legalism. I can see what they are doing, trying to keep order in the assembly, but whose assembly is it and who knows the heart of man to sanction it? Open sins you can judge, but secret sins you cannot judge, and making up sins is heresy.

We must have our sins dealt with, forgiven, and forgotten, before we can enter into that relationship with God. We do so through the Lord Jesus Christ and we must find Him to do that. It's personal not corporate, we don't join with Jesus as a group but as individuals.

65..... The Creator

Preparatory reading: John Chapter 1.

The Gospel of John gives a good introduction to our hero, the absolute King, the Creator Jesus. I didn't really get what was being said about Jesus for a long while, and so I was left in the poverty of the Gospel. By that I mean that my life was not enriched by Jesus.

The Gospel of John starts with an echo of Genesis Chapter 1, *Gen 1:1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth*..... *Joh 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* In the beginning, when God, Elohim, created heaven and earth, the Word also was with God and was God. That has really got you thinking, about how you can explain the metaphysical conundrum of how person can be "with" somebody and also be that somebody, "*the Word was with God, and the Word was God"*. And why call that person by the name "Word" and not Elohim?

The name "Word" tells us a few things about God. There is in that name a logical construct, the absolute source of information and that was brought to bear on everything in the universe. The "Word" is a language, it has semantics, a vocabulary, a grammar, and to be of any use must be understood by something. The universe did not come into existence of itself but was made by a creator, through speech. If you will, it was the representation of the mind of God spoken into existence. Everywhere you look in the universe is information, and it is as if the Creator left a bit of Himself, a signature, in every atom and ever thing that He ever made, *Job 38:7 when the morning stars sang in chorus, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?* That is why I think He is called the Word.

Who exactly is the Word, *Joh 1:2 He was in the beginning with God. Joh 1:3 All things came into being through Him, and without Him not even one thing came into being that has come into being.* The Word is not an abstract concept, the Word is a person, the Creator of all, "*All things came into being through Him"*. The Word is Him who made everything in the beginning. The poor fools who neglect this statement, chase shadows in order to find the origins of existence without a Creator. The very stuff of our being, DNA, is the product of the Word, it contains an alphabet, rules of grammar and it produces something, and it shouts to us of the Creator.

The mystery of the Word continues. Who are we talking about, for this Word is surely a person, but He is not going to be revealed yet and there is much more to be said about Him before revealing Him? *Joh 1:4 In Him was life, and the life (**ζωή)** was the light of men; Joh 1:5 and the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.* That word life, *ζωή = zōē*, is used of the life after this life, *Mat 18:8 Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life (**ζωή)** halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire.*

The Word was not only creating life in the beginning, but creates life beyond this world, and life beyond the judgement of everlasting fire, leading us there. The Word does so by lighting man's way, by giving him light in darkness which Light is not put out by the darkness. The Word, the Light, is a beacon, a torch, for humanity, the eternal sunlight in a world of shadows and darkness. That Word is Life and Light to all men.

The Word, the Life and the Light did not bear witness of itself, it had someone to announce the mysterious person, *Joh 1:6 There was a man sent from God; his name was John. Joh 1:7 He came for a witness, that he might witness concerning the Light, that all might believe through Him. Joh 1:8 He was not that Light, but that he might witness concerning the Light.* John the Baptist was sent into the world by God, and his sole purpose in life was to bear witness to this person, the Word. He was witnessing to the Light, although he was not the Light.

Why did God need somebody to bear witness to the Light, wasn't the Light witness of itself? It seems that the idea of a herald bearing messages from a king goes deep into our heritage. John was the herald of a coming king, who "*all might believe through Him".* Believe what and who? *Joh 1:9 He was the true Light; He enlightens every man coming into the world. Joh 1:10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through Him, yet the world did not know Him.*

The world had not heard of Him, or in the process of time the world had forgotten Him, *Joh 1:10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through Him,*

yet the world did not know ***(γινώσκω)*** *Him.* He was the One who had brought the world into being, but the world did not know Him. They knew of a God of creation but at the same time they did not know Him.

The word ginōskō, often describes the kind of knowledge involved in building an intimate relationship with a person. In fact, ginōskō is tied so tightly to relationships that it is used to describe the sexual relations between a husband and wife, Luk 1:34 Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? At the day of judgment, Jesus declared, many would claim to be His followers, but He would say "I never knew you", Mat 7:22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? Mat 7:23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Of course, He knew the facts about them, but He had no personal relationship with them. The Apostle John loves to use ginōskō to describe this deeper, person-to-person knowledge that characterizes God. Jesus chose ginōskō to describe the intimacy between the Father and the Son, as well as the connection between Himself and His sheep.

We see the two words for "know" used in a verse in John, *Joh 8:55 Yet ye have not known* ***γινώσκω*** *him; but I know* ***εἰδω*** *him: and if I should say, I know* ***εἰδω*** *him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know* ***εἰδω*** *him, and keep his saying*. They have no experience of who God is as a person, although facts are before them, but Jesus knows Him as a Person and knows the facts about Him. This intimate knowledge of the Word, this personal knowledge of God is brought to us by the Word that enlightens us.

God, the Word appeared to His own people who rejected Him, *Joh 1:11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. Joh 1:12* ***But as many as received Him, to them He gave authority to become children of God, to the ones believing into His name.*** Who are these people? They could have been specifically, the Jews, but it could have extended to all of mankind, all of the people that God created for Himself. Paul says to the Greeks that God made men to seek Him out, *Act17:24 This God made the world and everything in it. He is Lord of heaven and earth, and he doesn't live in temples built by human hands. Act 17:25 He doesn't need help from anyone. He gives life, breath, and everything else to all people. Act 17:26 From one person God made all nations who live on earth, and he decided when and where every nation would be. Act 17:27* ***God has done all this, so that we will look for him and reach out and find him. He isn't far from any of us.*** This clearly extends beyond the Israelite people.

The Word gave us the power, or the authority, to become His sons, literally children. But we become His children by faith, believing not "on" His name, but "in" His name and I think that there is a difference. Taking a simple example you

can swear on the Bible an oath, but it does not mean you believe in the contents. It is believing what you wish, or have been told, without going to the substance of that person. Yet still, we have not been told who He is, the One whom we should believe in.

Those who enjoy this privilege of being children are **born again,** not as we are, born of blood, born by the flesh, born by mans will, but by God's will, *Joh 1:13 who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but were born of God.* The children of God, the ones born again, are the privileged people of God, and this does not extend to everyone or to anyone who has not complied with the terms and conditions.

The Scripture says that the Word of God, became flesh and Tabernacled, or tented, or camped among us. A tent is not a permanent place to live, and this signifies the person yet to be revealed, like Abraham, who was passing through, *Heb 11:9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: Heb 11:10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God*. We read, *Joh 1:14 And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us. And we beheld His glory, glory as of an only begotten from the Father, full of grace and of truth.*

There are a number of points to be made here. The Word, as the hymn says, "**Word of the Father, Now in flesh appearing",** is given meaning by the Tabernacle, the tent given by God for meeting with the people of God. Jesus "Tabernacled" among us, camped among us humans, Tabernacled like the tent of the meeting and we beheld His glory. The word "glory" here means majesty, dignity, splendour.

It was the glory of the only begotten, μονογενής = monogenēs from the Father, *Mat 22:43 He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, Mat 22:44 The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? Mat 22:45 If David then call him Lord, how is he his son*? The way in which the Son relates to the Father is by begetting, or to put it in the reverse order, the Father generates the Son. *Joh 1:15 John witnesses concerning Him, and has cried out, saying, This One was He of whom I said, He coming after me has been before me, for He was preceding me. Joh 1:16 And out of His fullness we all received, and grace on top of grace. Joh 1:17 For the Law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through* ***Jesus Christ****. Joh 1:18 No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, that One declares Him.* LITV.

Substituting Jesus for the Word, which I think is perfectly legitimate, we get the opening verses of John to read like this, **In the beginning was Jesus, and Jesus was with God, and Jesus was God. The same was in the beginning**

with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not…….*And Jesus became flesh and tabernacled among us. And we beheld His glory, glory as of an only begotten from the Father, full of grace and of truth.*

The early creeds, in particular, the Nicene Creed, tell us that Christ is “very God of very God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father.” The concept of one God that is simultaneously three persons has long baffled many from within and outside of the church. But God is beyond human understanding, and the manner in which He reveals Himself to us cannot simply be set aside with a shrug of the shoulders, and complacent statements like, "Who can understand this" or "We see through a glass darkly, so you are free to believe and teach what you like."

The truth is how we understand the relationships between Jesus, the Father and Holy Spirit will have a great impact in what we teach regarding the salvation of man. In particular, it is essential we look at and understand Christ’s relationship to the Father because most of the controversy surrounding a proper confession of the Trinity has centered on the person of Jesus Christ and His connection to God.

God who is Jehovah Jesus, became a man to show men how to live with God not as equals, but in a relationship, *Php 2:5* ***Let this mind be in you****, which was also in Christ Jesus: Php 2:6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: Php 2:7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: Php 2:8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Php 2:9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: Php 2:10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; Php 2:11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*.

The idea that the Creator entered in to His creation, shows us that His concern went further than just making us, it went on to redeeming us from our failed attempt to go it alone without God. Except man joined with His maker, there was absolutely no hope of life. Man was born to fail, but that didn’t mean he was created bad, no, he was created good, but with the capacity to fail, *Gen 1:31 And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.*

The rescue mission was planned even before man was created, *1Pe 1:20 Christ was chosen even before the world was created, but because of you, he did not*

come until these last days. 1Pe 1:21 And when he did come, it was to lead you to have faith in God, who raised him from death and honored him in a glorious way. That's why you have put your faith and hope in God. CEV. It seems to me, that if Christ's mission of redemption preceded creation, mankind was bound to fall into sin. At the moment of creation, man was made in God's image but that did not preclude the fall. The idea that the rescue mission was an afterthought is preposterous, and by it God is held to ransom by events beyond His control.

There is a whole back story of which we are not privy to, yet. The creation and fall of the angels, why one is called the accuser before he man to accuse, why he was allowed to fall and drag his demons with him? They could not possess men because men were not created, so what did they do? These and many other questions may just be answered when we get to heaven.

66..... The Inevitability of Death

Preparatory reading: Ecclesiastes Chapter 12

This can be a most uncomfortable subject for many people but the only way to deal with it is to face up to it Biblically. If it is not dealt with Biblically, it is dealt with by lies and false comfort. The first recorded death in the Bible was Eve, followed by her husband Adam, *Gen 2:17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die*. They ate of the fruit and in that day they died, but not physically, *Gen 3:6 And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. Gen 3:7 And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons*.

This death was of course a spiritual death which would be followed in God's good time by physical death. The spiritual was dealt the first blow, followed the carnal death. This undergoes a reversal in Christ, *1Co 15:21 For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. 1Co 15:22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive*. I think that this verse points to the spiritual and carnal death.

The first recorded physical death according to the Bible was Abel, who was murdered by his brother, *1Jn 3:11 For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. 1Jn 3:12 Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous*. We read of this death, but do

not empathise with Adam and Eve over the loss of their son though perhaps we sympathise. We tend not feel for the loss which occurred so long ago, to people we did not really know. We are really insensitive to other peoples loss, but we should not be, *Rom 12:15 Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep*. By being sensitive we shall see more of what is involved with life.

When we were young, life stretched before us and the horizon of death was so far away, we thought that it was hardly worth thinking about. The subject of death doesn't enter our thoughts, we are so taken with the freshness of living, and we have little time for our Creator, we think that we are immortal. But He calls us to remember Him in our youth, *Ecc 12:1 Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them*; for life passes by very quickly, *Psa 109:23 I am gone like the shadow when it declineth*. When you are old, like me, the event horizon of death is imminent, and you can see gates through which every man will pass, standing before you. I know a man who doesn't like going to his colleague's funerals, because he is reminded too much of death, and as he put it, "I am approaching the end of the conveyor belt".

We do not mourn so much for the spiritual death of a man as for the physical death for some reason. Although the Bible shows we are all spiritually dead to begin with, *Eph 2:1 And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Eph 2:2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience*. You would not even know man was spiritually dead unless Jesus had told us. Possibly as a result of our thoughtlessness over spiritual death, we seldom worry about the sinner, in fact we talk to them as easily as we talk to believers, and we do not even think that they are the "dead", who will be much more dead, when the physical death overtakes them.

We do not really believe this and if we are honest with ourselves, this great truth that some people are already dead, they are "the living dead", and in their blindness they are staggering towards an everlasting death. If we did believe it, we would have a serious concern for them, and we wouldn't have idle conversations with them, or treat them in the same way as believers, to wish them well as they go on their awful journey to hell. We should see them as plague victims, dying men, men with incurable diseases, unless they come to the Saviour for healing. That shows our lack of concern for our fellow man in whose shoes we once walked.

Who are these dead? They are your children, your relations, husbands or wives, your colleagues, the people who take care of you, the people who serve you in a shop, the people who go to church, it is all of the people we rely upon, but who do not know Jesus as their Saviour. If we were fully aware of our state and the state of mankind, we would do as the Puritan Richard Baxter did, "I preached as

never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men." This story by Allen Stanton March 31, 2020, gives urgency to us all,

(https://gospelreformation.net/preach-as-a-dying-man-to-dying-men/)

> As preachers, we are subject to the same vices as others. We have a natural tendency to overlook the present and put off for tomorrow what we should do today. Often, that has crept in and directed my preaching. I have thought, "Today I will preach *this* way and tomorrow I will preach *that* way." But of course, we are not promised tomorrow. We only get to preach *today*! If this very day is our one last chance, would we preach differently? What if we preached as if our life depended on it, as if we were to stand before the justice seat immediately afterward and give an account? What if we pleaded with sinners and pleaded the case for evangelical faith? If we spoke as dying men to dying men?
>
> Today I stand ready and I long for that opportunity again. You see, I was a preacher for about 10 years, but I have suffered with a recent diagnosis and it is only with much difficulty that I am writing to you now. After months of what I assumed were headaches and migraines due to stress, an MRI discovered a mass on my brain October 20, 2019—a lime sized tumour in the left frontal lobe of my brain, located in the area that controls speech. I underwent a 5 hour long awake craniotomy to remove as much of the tumour as possible. The surgeon did an exceptional job and was able to resect 95-100% of the tumour. He closely monitored my speech throughout the procedure, but the swelling and trauma of surgery left me, for the time being, conversationally impaired. The surgeons had given me forewarning that I was facing the possibility of being unable to speak at all. So, although it might not be as eloquent, it is a real blessing that I am able to speak today. But that's not it!
>
> In the course of time, a very long four weeks to be exact, the pathology report came back and suggested that my tumour was what we never imagined but feared all along—that dreaded "C" word—cancer. I had a Grade 3 Anaplastic Oligodendroglioma, a rare and fairly aggressive form of brain cancer. Because of the nature of my tumour, treatment was scheduled to begin as soon as we could come up with the best possible plan of action. It didn't take long to realize we were headed to MD Anderson in Houston. We packed up the whole family, even bringing along a grandmother for an extra set of hands. After meeting with the oncologist and radiation specialist there we knew we were in the right place. For the following six weeks, we were Texas residents as I received my *thirty* rounds of radiation. Thankfully, the Lord was

> gracious to me and I suffered very minimal side effects during the treatment. I am currently waiting for a follow up MRI before beginning chemotherapy. If I tolerate it well, I will complete 6 cycles of chemo over approximately nine months. My journey has been long and yet there is a longer road that lays ahead. October 27th was my last time in the pulpit before my surgery and I pray the Lord will grant me many more opportunities to preach.
>
> Throughout this entire process, my elders have been so patience and understanding, telling me, "Take as much time as you need." I know I am not ready to ascend that sacred pulpit yet. Like the surgery and radiation, I am faced once again with the unknown side effects that lay ahead with the chemotherapy. But I ask myself, "What if I get the chance to preach again?" If I stepped into the pulpit and preached as a dying man to dying men, how remarkable that would be! You know that's what we all are anyway. *We are all dying preachers preaching to a dying audience*. Perhaps you could be driving, and a car could suddenly swerve and hit you. Perhaps you could suffer an aneurism or heart failure and suddenly have a heart attack without anyone knowing. Or perhaps you could suffer from persecution in some different portion of the world and Christ could call you home in an instant.
>
> I don't say this to cause you alarm, but I speak this way in order that you might take pause from your busy world. I say this so that you might sense, in a very real way that you might be preaching for the very last time. I say this so that you might do as the Psalmist says, "So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom" (Psa. 90:12).
>
> If I get another chance, I firmly resolve to preach in such a way—as a dying man to dying men. You are not promised tomorrow either, so I believe it would be wise for you to make that resolution as well. Preach in such a way that if tomorrow you stand before the judgment seat of Christ, you could glory; that you might say, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me" (Phil. 1:21–22).

It is literally a life and death situation for all of us. We are all going to die and not one of us will escape, but we can all prepare ourselves for the inevitable. We are on a sinking ship, but it is not the same for everyone, some will be saved and others will not, and while in the same boat, the believer can support and rescue his fellow sufferers.

I have seen a thing that is disappointing in my life, and that is how the attitude of Christians towards unbelievers grows into one of avoidance and looking down upon them as being unclean, and that we should not have anything to do with them. Like the hypocrite in the Bible who thanked God for being self-righteous, *Luk 18:11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican*.

Certainly, you should not compromise your faith, *2Co 6:14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?* There are also limits which you do not go beyond, but that is dependent on how far your conscience is enlightened, and you cannot make it the same for everyone. If the unbeliever were an outcast, how would you expect Jesus to minister to sinners*, Mat 9:11 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? Mat 9:12 But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. Mat 9:13 But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*.

It seems that sometimes we get a little superior in our faith, in fact I was caused to think about this obituary that I read, “Secure in the sure and certain hope of eternal life through his Saviour Jesus Christ”. I may be wrong and that the person may not have written it themselves, but it seems to me to be like a boast, “I am secure in the sure and certain hope of eternal life” and then as an afterthought “through his Saviour Jesus Christ”. “I have got eternal life” and “I got it through Jesus, and you can all get it too”, as if eternal life is the important thing. It wouldn’t really matter if Christ wasn’t there because we’ve got eternal life. Well it would matter to me. What is eternal life without Christ but hell itself?

I think that we should approach death with absolute humility, and it is Christ first and the bonus of eternal life second. We come to Jesus first because He is the Saviour, not a person who doles out eternal life like sweets, and your brush with Jesus gives you the right to be saved forever, despite you taking little interest in Him afterwards. Your sins were forgiven, but after that you were so self confident that you were careless over your life and neglected how you walked with Jesus. That does not make you secure, only by sticking close to Jesus are we made secure*, 1Jn 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: 1Jn 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin*.

This is a dark world in which we see through a glass darkly, or to translate the Greek, through a mirror in an enigma, a shadow, we see enigmatically, something which is hard to explain. It is similar to Moses with whom God spoke,

Num 12:7 My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. Num 12:8 With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches (LXX enigma)*; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?* We still do not see heaven as we will see it and though we communicate with Jesus through prayer, He does not speak to us as God spoke to Moses, “mouth to mouth”. But Jesus does speak to us and more of this in another chapter.

We are going on that journey beyond life, like it or not, and being graciously warned we have time to prepare for it. Time to review our life, time to set things straight, time to make sure you have no regrets, time to be serious about your faith and stop indulging yourself in the world, time to get your relationship right with Jesus, and to really look forward to meeting with Him.

You would think, talking to many Christians that it was a great hardship to leave this earth because there is so much that they want to do. These people see themselves as absolutely necessary to God’s plans that to take them would deprive God of His aim if they were taken too soon. How absolutely pompous, self serving and hypocritical, to think that we are anything, that we are not expendable and that God who has been working from the beginning of time, needs us, a creature whose life will pass as quickly “as a weavers shuttle”, to shore His work up, *Luk 17:7 If your servant comes in from plowing or from taking care of the sheep, would you say, "Welcome! Come on in and have something to eat"? Luk 17:8 No, you wouldn't say that. You would say, "Fix me something to eat. Get ready to serve me, so I can have my meal. Then later on you can eat and drink." Luk 17:9 Servants don't deserve special thanks for doing what they are supposed to do. Luk 17:10 And that's how it should be with you. When you've done all you should, then say, "We are merely servants, and we have simply done our duty."* CEV.

I am a mortal being and in Jesus alone lies immortality, *1Ti 6:14 That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: 1Ti 6:15 Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; 1Ti 6:16 Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen*. I am a poor servant who looks to Him only for my life.

When we go we go to God, are we prepared? *Amo 4:11 I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD. Amo 4:12 Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee,* ***prepare to meet thy God, O Israel****. Amo 4:13 For, lo, he that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is*

his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth, The LORD, The God of hosts, is his name.

When we die, what do we leave as a message from the grave, to those who remain? What do we want as our epitaph? Do we leave them with a thought about our security, a sort of “in your face” statement about how we think we are there in heaven? Or do we direct them to Christ alone and say only, “Follow Jesus”? I know what I want to leave.

I didn’t think of death at all once upon a time, but now it is imminent it has become a joyful meditation.

67..... Abraham and Melchizedek

Preparatory reading: Genesis Chapter 14 and Hebrews Chapter 7.

The next great person that I want to look at is Abraham and who is the father of a new race, the father of the Children of Israel. I am deliberately not going through Scripture in a time sequence and we shall be jumping about a bit. One of the great men that Abraham encounters was called Melchizedek and he was a priest of the most high God who blessed Abraham, *Heb 7:1 For this* ***Melchisedec, King of Salem, priest of the most high God****, who met Abraham returning from smiting the kings, and blessed him*. This person somehow knew of Abraham’s brave attempt at recovering his nephew Lot and went to bless him. Melchizedek appears out of nowhere, *Heb 7:1 Melchizedek was both king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He was the one who went out and gave Abraham his blessing, when Abraham returned from killing the kings. Heb 7:2 Then Abraham gave him a tenth of everything he had. The meaning of the name Melchizedek is "King of Justice." But since Salem means "peace," he is also "King of Peace." Heb 7:3 We are not told that he had a father or mother or ancestors or beginning or end. He is like the Son of God and will be a priest forever*.

I really struggled with the book of Hebrews because it threw me from the New Testament back to the Old Testament and the Old Testament was, I thought, a mere footnote in history. To understand Hebrews I had to understand Genesis and Exodus, no mean feat for a beginner.

Melchizedek is like Jesus, another appearance of Jesus in Abraham’s life, is one which is not lost on the writer of Hebrews*, Heb 7:20 And inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest: Heb 7:21 But Jesus became a priest by means of a vow when God said to him,* ***"The Lord has made a solemn promise and will not take it back: 'You will be a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek'*** *" Heb 7:22 This difference, then, also* ***makes Jesus the***

guarantee of a better covenant. *Heb 7:23 There is another difference: there were many of those other priests, because they died and could not continue their work. Heb 7:24 But Jesus lives on forever, and his work as priest does not pass on to someone else. Heb 7:25 And so he is able, now and always, to save those who come to God through him, because he lives forever to plead with God for them. Heb 7:26* ***Jesus, then, is the High Priest that meets our needs. He is holy; he has no fault or sin in him; he has been set apart from sinners and raised above the heavens***. GNB.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews draws the argument from the 110th Psalm, *Psa 110:1 A Psalm of David. The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. Psa 110:2 The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Psa 110:3 Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth. Psa 110:4* ***The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek***. So Melchizedek is Jesus to Abraham, another showing of Jesus in Genesis.

But what is Melchizedek, a Jebusite doing granting blessings to Abraham? Jebusites were members of a Canaanite people living in and around the ancient city of Jebus on the site of Jerusalem, on the mountains of Moriah, the same place Abraham was told to sacrifice Isaac. Some 470 years or so later the Jebusites would become sworn enemies of the Israelites, who had a mandate from God to exterminate them, *Deu 7:1 When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the* ***Jebusites,*** *seven nations greater and mightier than thou; Deu 7:2 And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee;* ***thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them****; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them*:

Well, a nation today cannot be judged by the past, unless it does the same sins and we are not responsible for the actions of the past generations, neither are the past generations responsible for what their descendents do, *Eze 18:19 You may wonder why a son isn't punished for the sins of his father. It is because the son does what is right and obeys my laws. Eze 18:20* ***Only those who sin will be put to death****. Children won't suffer for the sins of their parents, and parents won't suffer for the sins of their children. Good people will be rewarded for what they do, and evil people will be punished for what they do*. CEV.

So we might excuse Melchizedek from any of the sins of his future progeny. Indeed Abraham was happy to live among the Canaanites at that time, but did not intermarry, *Gen 24:36 And Sarah my master's wife bare a son to my master when she was old: and unto him hath he given all that he hath. Gen 24:37 And*

my master made me swear, saying, ***Thou shalt not take a wife to my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell****: Gen 24:38 But thou shalt go unto my father's house, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son*. The fact that he knew the most high God, as a Canaanite, showed that they were living in different times.

In fact the Israelites did not succeed in driving out all the inhabitants of Canaan, and the Jebusites kept their stronghold in Jerusalem*, Jos 15:63 As for the Jebusites the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah could not drive them out: but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Judah at Jerusalem unto this day*.

This raises an intriguing question as to why they could not get rid of them for at least 400 years, from the time of Moses to the time of David! *2Sa 5:4 David was thirty years old when he became king, and he ruled for forty years. 2Sa 5:5 He lived in Hebron for the first seven and a half years and ruled only Judah. Then he moved to Jerusalem, where he ruled both Israel and Judah for thirty-three years. 2Sa 5:6 The Jebusites lived in Jerusalem, and David led his army there to attack them. The Jebusites did not think he could get in, so they told him, "You can't get in here! We could run you off, even if we couldn't see or walk!" 2Sa 5:7 David told his troops, "You will have to go up through the water tunnel to get those Jebusites. I hate people like them who can't walk or see." That's why there is still a rule that says, "Only people who can walk and see are allowed in the temple."* ***David captured the fortress on Mount Zion, then he moved there and named it David's City.*** *He had the city rebuilt, starting with the landfill to the east.* CEV.

More detail is given in Chronicles, *1Ch 11:4 Jerusalem was called Jebus at the time, and David led Israel's army to attack the town. 1Ch 11:5 The Jebusites said, "You won't be able to get in here!" But David captured the fortress of Mount Zion, which is now called the City of David. 1Ch 11:6 David had told his troops, "The first soldier to kill a Jebusite will become my army commander." And since Joab son of Zeruiah attacked first, he became commander. 1Ch 11:7 Later, David moved to the fortress—that's why it's called the City of David. 1Ch 11:8 He had the city rebuilt, starting at the landfill on the east side. Meanwhile, Joab supervised the repairs to the rest of the city. 1Ch 11:9 David became a great and strong ruler, because the LORD All-Powerful was on his side*. CEV.

This was one of the great prizes that had evaded Israel for centuries. The name Zion is of Hebrew origin meaning "highest point", and King David chose this as his capital. Its capture paved the way for Solomon’s rule, the complete subjugation of Canaan and the largest expanse of the kingdom of Israel.

Why did the Israelites fail to capture Jebus? I wonder whether God in His wisdom, kept it in the hands of Melchizedek’s family until the heir of the kingdom, the David/Christ figure was to come and take it? It was almost immediately after this

that David brought the Ark into Jerusalem and set it in the Tent of David before the Temple was built to house it. The Tent or Tabernacle of David was to be a symbol of Christ's church, and it was to be rebuilt in another time, *Act 15:16 After these things I will turn back, and I will build again the tabernacle of David, that is fallen down, and its ruins I will build again, and will set it upright — Act 15:17 that the residue of men may seek after the Lord, and all the nations, upon whom My name hath been called, saith the Lord, who is doing all these things*. YLT.

Returning to Melchizedek, we see that he gets a lot of coverage in the New Testament particularly in the letter to the Hebrews. The relationship between the Levitical priesthood, which came out of Aaron, Moses brother, and the priesthood of Christ, is shown. The priesthood of Levi was inferior to the priesthood of Christ, subservient to it, and this is shown by the following, *Heb 7:1 For this Melchisedec, King of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from smiting the kings, and blessed him; Heb 7:2 to whom Abraham gave also the tenth portion of all; **{**first being interpreted King of righteousness, and then also King of Salem, which is King of peace; Heb 7:3 without father, without mother, without genealogy; having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but assimilated to the Son of God, abides a priest continually**.}** Heb 7:4 Now consider how great this personage was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth out of the spoils. Heb 7:5 And they indeed from among the sons of Levi, who receive the priesthood, have commandment to take tithes from the people according to the law, that is from their brethren, though these are come out of the loins of Abraham: Heb 7:6 but he who has no genealogy from them has tithed Abraham, and blessed him who had the promises. Heb 7:7 But beyond all gainsaying, the inferior is blessed by the better. Heb 7:8 And here dying men receive tithes; but there one of whom the witness is that he lives; Heb 7:9* ***and, so to speak, through Abraham, Levi also, who received tithes, has been made to pay tithes.*** *Heb 7:10 For he was yet in the loins of his father when Melchisedec met him.* Darby.

The act of "tithing" was only conducted once by Abraham, it was not a weekly giving, a yearly giving or a perpetual giving, it was given once only as far as Scripture is concerned. It was given out of the spoils of war and nowhere does it state that it came from Abraham's income, of his flocks and crops. It was different in its content to the Levitical tithe but it was given to Melchizedek to make a point the priesthood of Christ was superior to the priesthood of Aaron, not to make a point about tithing.

It showed the Levitical priests bowed down, as it were, to the higher priesthood of Christ, *Heb 7:11 If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?*

The Levitical or Aaronic priests were just temporary recipients of the priesthood until Christ came along. When God gave the Tabernacle, He said*, Exo 25:9 According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and* ***the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it.....*** *Exo 25:40 And look that thou make them after their pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount.* And when David got the plans for the Temple he did not make them up himself, he got them from God, *1Ch 28:19 All this, said David,* ***the LORD made me understand in writing by his hand upon me,*** *even all the works of this pattern.*

Everything, the implements, the furniture, the sacrifices, were all patterned upon something in heaven. *Heb 8:5* ***Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things****, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.* God was more concerned with heaven than earth, and all this pointed upwards.

The earth was merely a stage on which the grand theme of the Universe was acted out, which was the glory of Christ. One academician has said commenting upon Shakespeare,

> Life is not a bed of roses. It has its ups and downs. A man has to move through different phases during his life time. Shakespeare compared the entire world to a stage in his poem, “All the world’s a stage.” We all are mere players in this stage of life. Shakespeare presents a philosophical reflection of life in “All the world’s a stage.” He exhibits each stage undergone by a man, during his course of a life time. The seven stages of encompass infancy, childhood, boyhood, adulthood, middle age, old age, second childhood. All the materialistic happiness and reputations are secondary as death will capture everyone in the end; death is the great conqu*eror.*

But what he does not say is what comes next, the meeting with Jesus, *Heb 9:27 And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.* There is a greater stage, a greater reality to which this life points, and Jesus shows us this life, *Joh 3:3 Jesus replied, "I tell you for certain that you must be born from above before you can see God's kingdom!"* The reality is again shown in the letter to the Hebrews, *Heb 9:22 The Law says that almost everything must be sprinkled with blood, and no sins can be forgiven unless blood is offered. Heb 9:23* ***These things are only copies of what is in heaven****, and so they had to be made holy by these ceremonies. But the real things in heaven must be made holy by something better. Heb 9:24 This is why Christ did not go into a tent that had been made by humans and was only a copy of the real one.* ***Instead, he went into heaven and is now there with God to help us****.* CEV.

So what seems to be a small incident in the life of Abraham and Melchizedek, one hardly meriting a second glance to someone reading the history of Abraham, is critical to understanding the priesthood of Jesus. It shows that Christ's is the supreme priesthood, and that it is constituted in heaven, and the coming Levitical priesthood in the time of Moses has only earthly value and not a heavenly value. It divides the faithful from the unbeliever, the disciples of Jesus from the Pharisees and scribes who do not see the importance of Jesus as our heavenly High Priest, *Heb 3:1 My Christian friends, who also have been called by God! Think of Jesus, whom God sent to be the High Priest of the faith we profess.*

The priesthood was a type or example of something much better, *Heb 8:1 Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; Heb 8:2 A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man*. All "priests" were to be an example of Jesus. They were to be Jesus to the people but sadly many failed. In fact it wasn't just the priests, all men in Christ have a duty to be like Christ.

68..... The Birthright

Preparatory reading: Genesis Chapter 25

There is in Scripture something which seem inequitable, namely the firstborn does not always inherit from the father, but that the second born does. This is seen in Isaac's twin sons Jacob and Esau, *Gen 25:22 And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to enquire of the LORD. Gen 25:23 And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and* ***the elder shall serve the younger****. Gen 25:24 And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. Gen 25:25 And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name* ***Esau.*** *Gen 25:26 And after that came his brother out, and* ***his hand took hold on Esau's heel****; and his name was called* ***Jacob:*** *and Isaac was threescore years old when she bare them. Gen 25:27 And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. Gen 25:****28 And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob.***

Like many families, there were conflicts, differences and favourites in the families of Abraham's descendants, and here with his son Isaac, it was no

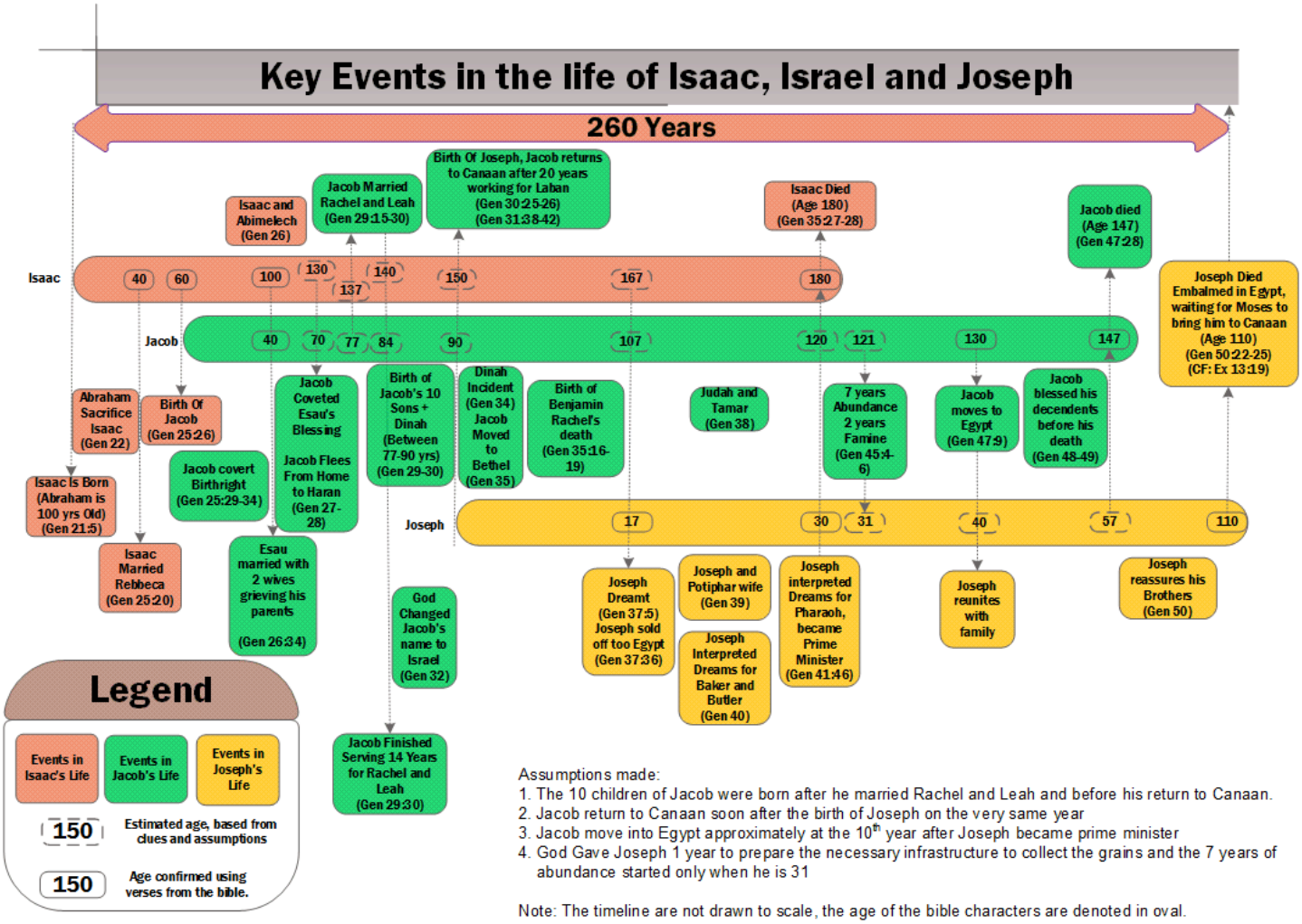
different. It is a story of two boys with different ambitions and tastes, one a hunter and the other a shepherd. The first baby to emerge was reddish and his whole body was like a hairy mantle, so they named him Esau meaning hairy and ruddy. The baby Jacob was a “heel catcher” or supplanter, and grasped his brother Esau when he was born, and so the name Jacob.

Jacob gained his birthright by a seeming subterfuge, and he seemed to have a devious streak in him, and we see this characteristic when he deceives his father with his mother’s help. One day Esau came in and was too lazy to cook and he sold his birthright for a bowl of stew, *Gen 25:29 One day, Jacob was cooking some stew, when Esau came home hungry Gen 25:30 and said, "I'm starving to death! Give me some of that red stew right now!" That's how Esau got the name "Edom." Gen 25:31 Jacob replied, "Sell me your rights as the first-born son." Gen 25:32 "I'm about to die," Esau answered. "What good will those rights do me?" Gen 25:33 But Jacob said, "Promise me your birthrights, here and now!" And that's what Esau did. Gen 25:34 Jacob then gave Esau some bread and some of the bean stew, and when Esau had finished eating and drinking, he just got up and left, showing how little he thought of his rights as the first-born*.

But are we correct in saying the he was a devious little man, or was he responding to something deep in his heart, like Moses, *Act 7:22 And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds. Act 7:23 And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. Act 7:24 And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: Act 7:25 For* ***he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not****.* Jacob valued the birthright, *“Sell me your rights as the first-born son”,* and Esau didn’t.

Jacob kept that promise for some years before he claimed it, and in fact he was no longer a boy when he claimed it, he was an **old boy**. The picture we have of two young lads in conflict with each other is not true, you have often seen pictures of the two boys, Esau going hunting to get his father some venison while Jacob made him a meal from his flocks. **They were both 70 years old,** they were “old boys”.

The Timeline is given by permission of “The hesitant prize fighter” website,


Key Events in the life of Isaac, Israel and Joseph
260 Years
Isaac
Jacob
Joseph
Isaac and Abimelech (Gen 26)
Jacob Married Rachel and Leah (Gen 29:15-30)
Birth Of Joseph, Jacob returns to Canaan after 20 years working for Laban (Gen 30:25-26) (Gen 31:38-42)
Isaac Died (Age 180) (Gen 35:27-28)
Jacob died (Age 147) (Gen 47:28)
Joseph Died Embalmed in Egypt, waiting for Moses to bring him to Canaan (Age 110) (Gen 50:22-25) (CF: Ex 13:19)
Abraham Sacrifice Isaac (Gen 22)
Birth Of Jacob (Gen 25:26)
Isaac is Born (Abraham is 100 yrs Old) (Gen 21:5)
Jacob covert Birthright (Gen 25:29-34)
Jacob Coveted Esau's Blessing
Jacob Flees From Home to Haran (Gen 27-28)
Birth of Jacob's 10 Sons + Dinah (Between 77-90 yrs) (Gen 29-30)
Dinah Incident (Gen 34) Jacob Moved to Bethel (Gen 35)
Birth of Benjamin Rachel's death (Gen 35:16-19)
Judah and Tamar (Gen 38)
7 years Abundance 2 years Famine (Gen 45:4-6)
Jacob moves to Egypt (Gen 47:9)
Jacob blessed his decendents before his death (Gen 48-49)
Isaac Married Rebbeca (Gen 25:20)
Esau married with 2 wives grieving his parents (Gen 26:34)
God Changed Jacob's name to Israel (Gen 32)
Joseph Dreamt (Gen 37:5) Joseph sold off too Egypt (Gen 37:36)
Joseph and Potiphar wife (Gen 39)
Joseph Interpreted Dreams for Baker and Butler (Gen 40)
Joseph interpreted Dreams for Pharaoh, became Prime Minister (Gen 41:46)
Joseph reunites with family
Joseph reassures his Brothers (Gen 50)
Jacob Finished Serving 14 Years for Rachel and Leah (Gen 29:30)
Legend
Events in Isaac's Life
Events in Jacob's Life
Events in Joseph's Life
150 Estimated age, based from clues and assumptions
150 Age confirmed using verses from the bible.
Assumptions made:
1. The 10 children of Jacob were born after he married Rachel and Leah and before his return to Canaan.
2. Jacob return to Canaan soon after the birth of Joseph on the very same year
3. Jacob move into Egypt approximately at the 10th year after Joseph became prime minister
4. God Gave Joseph 1 year to prepare the necessary infrastructure to collect the grains and the 7 years of abundance started only when he is 31
Note: The timeline are not drawn to scale, the age of the bible characters are denoted in oval.

It seems that Isaac's desire for venison triggered the whole deceit, *Gen 27:1 And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his eldest son, and said unto him, My son: and he said unto him, Behold, here am I. Gen 27:2 And he said, Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death: Gen 27:3 Now therefore take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me some venison; Gen 27:4 And* ***make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me****, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die*.

It was Rebekah who got Jacob to deceive his father, *Gen 27:5 And Rebekah heard when Isaac spake to Esau his son. And Esau went to the field to hunt for venison, and to bring it. Gen 27:6 And Rebekah spake unto Jacob her son, saying, Behold, I heard thy father speak unto Esau thy brother, saying, Gen 27:7 Bring me venison, and make me savoury meat, that I may eat, and bless thee before the LORD before my death. Gen 27:8* ***Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to that which I command thee***.

I am surprised that he could not tell the difference between venison and goat, or his wife's cooking and Esau's cooking, but sometimes desire masks truth. Isaac

was 130 years old and had 50 years to live, so was this just an excuse to get the meat he loved? Anyway, these two septuagenarians, battle it out in the race to finish first in a cookery contest, and Jacob wins his father's approval, *Gen 27:21 And Isaac said unto Jacob, Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou be my very son Esau or not. Gen 27:22 And Jacob went near unto Isaac his father; and he felt him, and said,* ***The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau****. Gen 27:23 And he discerned him not, because his hands were hairy, as his brother Esau's hands: so he blessed him. Gen 27:24 And he said, Art thou my very son Esau? And he said, I am. Gen 27:25 And he said, Bring it near to me, and I will eat of my son's venison, that my soul may bless thee. And he brought it near to him, and he did eat: and he brought him wine, and he drank.*

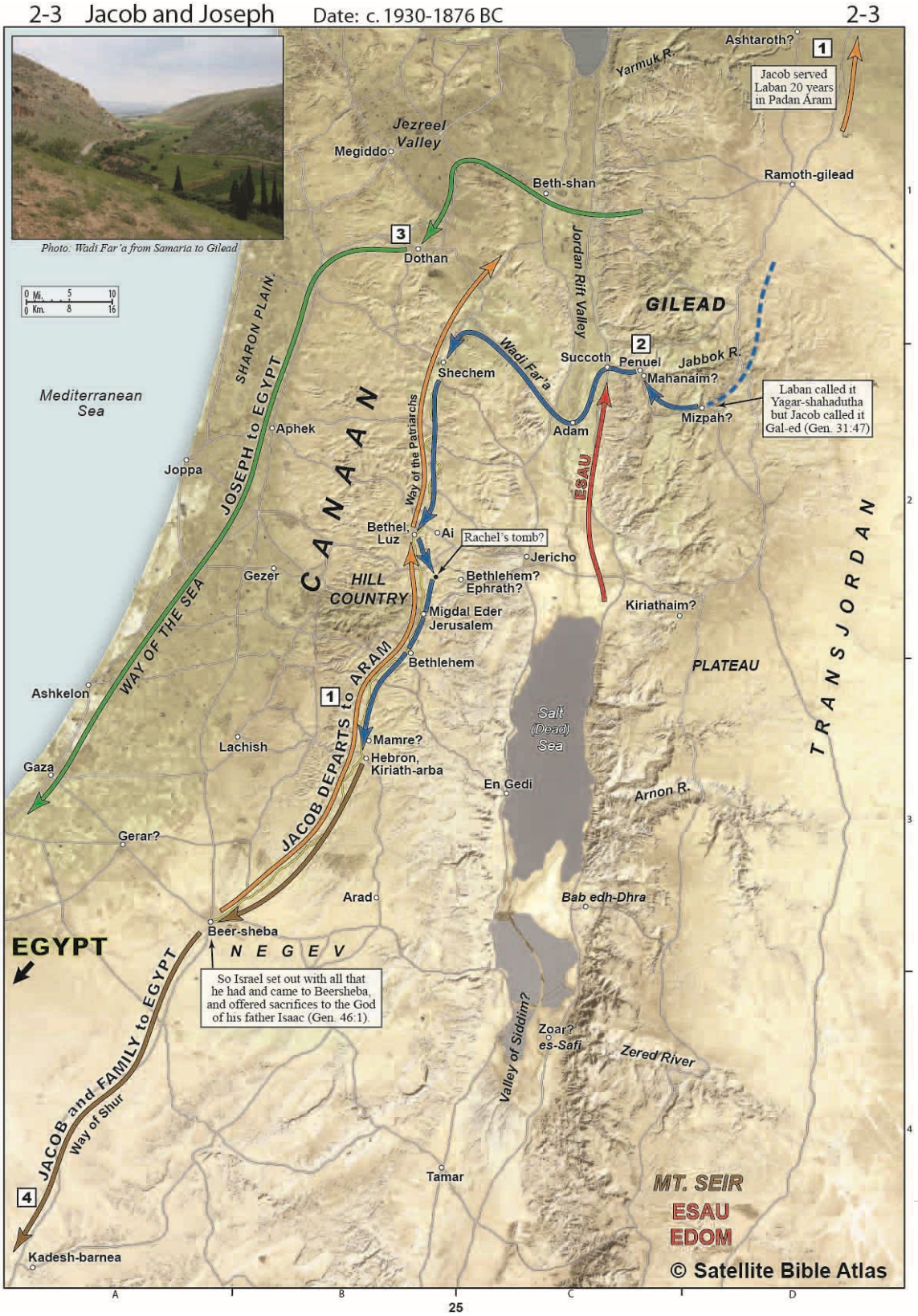
Now the upshot was that Esau was furious with Jacob, *Gen 27:41 And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand****; then will I slay my brother Jacob****. Gen 27:42 And these words of Esau her elder son were told to Rebekah: and she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and said unto him, Behold, thy brother Esau, as touching thee, doth comfort himself, purposing to kill thee. Gen 27:43 Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; and arise, flee thou to Laban my brother to Haran; Gen 27:44 And tarry with him a few days, until thy brother's fury turn away*;

Every cloud has a silver lining and for Jacob, cast out of his ancestral home of 70 years, he seeks refuge and a wife, from his uncle in Haran in Turkey. But in reality this story is about two covenants and the Second Covenant, the New Covenant, supersedes the Old Covenant, the Old Testament, just as Jacob supersedes Esau and for this reason it is said, *Rom 9:11 (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) Rom 9:12 It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. Rom 9:13* ***As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.*** *Rom 9:14 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. Rom 9:15 For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion*. God loves the New Covenant, but hates the Old Covenant.

Jacob will have an encounter with Jehovah Jesus for possibly the first time as he moves to Haran from Beersheba, *Gen 28:10 And Jacob went out from Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. Gen 28:11 And he came on a place and stayed the night there, for the sun had gone. And he took stones of the place and placed them at his head; and he lay down in that place. Gen 28:12 And he dreamed. And, behold, a ladder was placed on the earth, its top reaching to the heavens. And, behold, the angels of God were going up and going down on it! Gen 28:13 And, behold, Jehovah stood above it and said, I am Jehovah the God of your father*

Abraham, and the God of Isaac; the land on which you are lying, I will give it to you and to your seed. LITV.

While sleeping, Jacob receives a dream from God that changes his life. He sees a large structure like a ladder, tower, or staircase, reaching up from earth to



heaven. Along this ladder, he sees angels ascending and descending on it. Then Jehovah Jesus' voice rings out as he speaks to Jacob.
At Babel mankind had tried to build a tower to heaven, to get to heaven and make them a name, *Gen 11:4 And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower,* ***whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.*** *Gen 11:5 And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. Gen 11:6 And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Gen 11:7 Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. Gen 11:8 So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Gen 11:9 Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth*. LITV.

They are like all men who try to avoid Christ and get to heaven by another way, a humanistic way and in doing so they try and make a name for themselves without God. Later on in Genesis, when Jacob enters the story, Jehovah Jesus shows him the there is a way to heaven, by God's ladder, and what men tried to do but failed, He would do by His own work. This is shown by the dialogue with Nathanael, *Joh 1:48 Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. Joh 1:49 Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel. Joh 1:50 Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. Joh 1:51 And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and* ***the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man****.*

Jesus says that the scattering at Babel is reversed, and that Christ is the Ladder upon which men go to heaven. A similar theme is played out on the day of Pentecost where the various languages are brought into one by the Spirit of God.

Gen 28:16 And Jacob awakened from his sleep, and said, Surely Jehovah is in this place, and I did not know. Gen 28:17 And he was afraid, and said, How fearful is this place! This is nothing except the house of God, and this is the door to Heaven. Gen 28:18 And Jacob started up early in the morning and took the stone which he had placed at his head, and he placed it as a pillar; and he poured oil on the top of it. Gen 28:19 And he called the name of that place, The House of God. And yet the name of the city was at first Luz.

What Jacob sees in a dream, Nathaniel sees in reality, he sees Christ in the Flesh.

69..... Family Strife

Preparatory reading: Genesis Chapter 29

You will note with the family of God, that they still suffer the same issues both in the Old Testament and the New. The problems we saw at Corinth are the same as in Jacob's family, with the common root of sin.

Jacob arrives in Haran and goes to his uncles' house where he falls in love with Rachel, and the script seems to follow a plot in a Thomas Hardy novel. It doesn't turn out to be the fairy tale wedding he had bargained for, and in a twist to the story, after 7 years, this man Jacob, now 78 years old, is given the sister Leah and not Rachel.

Gen 29:16 And Laban had two daughters, the name of the older, Leah, and the name of the younger, Rachel. Gen 29:17 And the eyes of Leah were weak, and Rachel was beautiful of form and beautiful of appearance. Gen 29:18 And Jacob loved Rachel, and said, I will serve you seven years for Rachel, your younger daughter. Gen 29:19 And Laban said, It is better for me to give her to you than to give her to another man; live with me. Gen 29:20 And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they were in his eyes like a few days, in his love for her. Gen 29:21 And Jacob said unto Laban, Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in unto her. Gen 29:22 And Laban gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast. Gen 29:23 And it came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter, and brought her to him; and he went in unto her. Gen 29:24 And Laban gave unto his daughter Leah Zilpah his maid for an handmaid. Gen 29:25 ***And it came to pass, that in the morning, behold, it was Leah: and he said to Laban, What is this thou hast done unto me? did not I serve with thee for Rachel?*** *wherefore then hast thou beguiled me*?

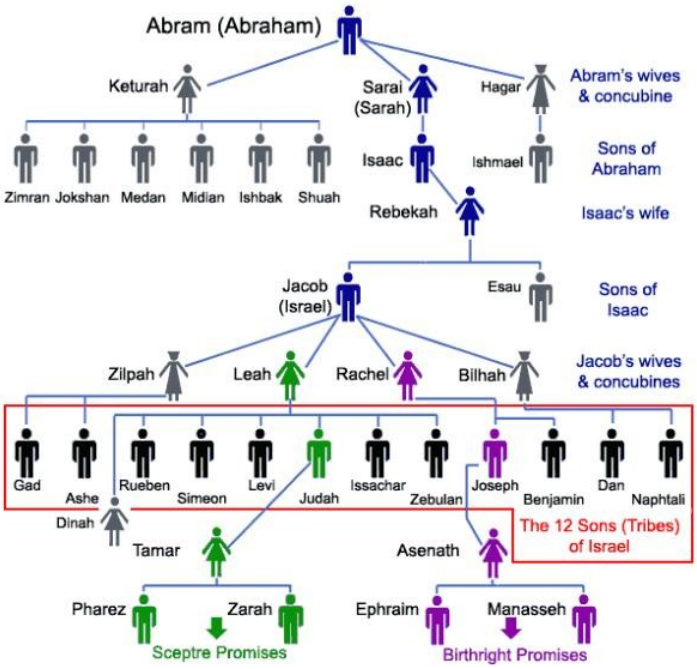
I suppose that he was a willing victim to the deceit, he wanted it to be Rachel, and in the dark of the tent, like his father who couldn't see well and tell the difference between Jacob and Esau, neither could he tell the difference between the two sisters in the dark. Which goes to show that most of what we think of someone is formed in the mind not in solid reality, and if it had been eternally dark Jacob would have been eternally content, for physically, one woman must be just the same as another.

This again is like the two Covenants, Leah the Old Covenant and Rachel the New Covenant. "Jacob I have loved, Esau I have hated", so Rachel (the younger) was loved but Leah (the elder) was hated. *Gen 29:31And Jehovah saw that Leah was hated. And He opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. Gen*

Genesis 29-30	Numbers 1	Revelation 7
Reuben	Reuben	Reuben
Simeon	Simeon	Simeon
Levi		Levi
Judah	Judah	Judah
Dan	Dan	
Naphtali	Naphtali	Naphtali
Gad	Gad	Gad
Asher	Asher	Asher
Isaachar	Isaachar	Isaachar
Zebulun	Zebulun	Zebulun
Joseph		Joseph
	Ephraim	
	Manesseh	Manasseh
Benjamin	Benjamin	Benjamin

29:32 And Leah conceived and bore a son. And she called his name Reuben; for she said, Surely Jehovah has looked on my affliction, for now my husband will love me. Gen 29:33 And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, Surely Jehovah has heard that I am hated and has given this one to me also. And she called his name Simeon. Gen 29:34 And she conceived again and bore a son. And she said, Now, this time my husband will be joined to me, because I have borne to him three sons. So his name was called Levi. Gen 29:35 And she conceived again and bore a son. And she said, This time I praise Jehovah. So she called his name Judah. And she ceased from bearing. LITV.

To cut a long and interesting story short, which I urge you to read, Jacob had a total of 12 sons and one daughter, the sons forming the clan that would be called "Israel", namely the twelve tribes of Israel, although they do not appear to be made up of the same "persons" each time the "12 Tribes" are mentioned. This leads me to think that the whole of that tribe is symbolic.



Let us go slowly at this point in History, because there is a lot going on that will shape the future.

Firstly, where does the promise that was given to Abraham, then to Isaac and then to Jacob, to have seed, go to next, *Gen 28:14 And your seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and you shall spread to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south;* ***and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your Seed****. Gen 28:15 And, behold, I will be with you and will guard you in every place in which you may go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not forsake you until I have surely done that which I have spoken to you. Gen 28:16 And Jacob awakened from his sleep, and said, Surely Jehovah is in this place, and I did not know*. Did the blessing of God finish with Jacob such that all families of the earth are blessed and that blessing is transferred to everyone?

Remember, that there was no one called an Israelite, a Jew or a Gentile at the time this is written. So when Jacob is told by Jehovah Jesus that his seed would spread over the whole earth, "*to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south*", there was not the slightest notion of a "Holy Nation" separate from the rest of the nations, with all of their laws and practices. Jacob was just the seed bearer, which seed you remember was Christ and that by this promise he was going to spread "Christ" throughout the world.

And it is important to observe, that he was not going to be the only one who had the children, and start a great dynasty all to himself, because “other” families, in other parts of the earth, were going to be blessed through Jacob. Jacob would not have all the children of the earth, other fathers would have children and so their families would be increased and blessed, but this would all come to them through the promises to Jacob.

Well, what was the blessing to Jacob and how do we get it? We can see that whatever the blessing was, it was achieved without being an Israelite, or a Jew, because they did not exist. It was not achieved by any known religious affiliation, by being a Moslem, by being a Buddhist or Hindu, or any other religion, since they were not around yet, and it was not by following a creed. The Temple had not been built yet and so it was not by worshipping in that building or any other structure. It was not gained by doing anything, sacrificing anything, because it was by a promise without conditions, *Gen 28:13 And, behold, Jehovah stood above it and said, I am Jehovah the God of your father Abraham, and the God of Isaac; the land on which you are lying, I will give it to you and to your* ***seed****. Gen 28:14 And your seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and you shall spread to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your Seed. Gen 28:15* ***And, behold, I will be with you and will guard you in every place in which you may go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not forsake you until I have surely done that which I have spoken to you***.

What was God giving them? It was the land, and the “seed” would get the land and they would be gathered back to “this land”, and God would do it all. All the families of the earth would be blessed in faithful Abraham, *Gal 3:16 But the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his Seed (it does not say, And to seeds, as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," which is Christ). Gal 3:17 And I say this, A covenant having been ratified before to Christ by God, the Law coming into being four hundred and thirty years after, does not annul the promise, so as to abolish it. Gal 3:18 For if the inheritance is of Law, it is no more of promise; but God has given it to Abraham through promise.* That land that he looked to was not on earth but in heaven, *Heb 11:8 Having been called out by faith, Abraham obeyed to go forth to a place which he was going to receive for an inheritance; and he went out not understanding where he went. Heb 11:9 By faith he resided as a foreigner in a land of promise,* ***living in tents*** *with Isaac and Jacob, the joint-heirs of the same promise; Heb 11:10* ***for he looked forward to a city having the foundations of which the builder and maker is God****.*

We learn something here, and that is there is an earthly part to the promise of God and a heavenly part. There was the earthly land of Canaan which God granted to Israel, but it had a counterpart in heaven, and those that saw this, like Abraham, did not put up any permanent dwelling, but looked to the heavens for the fulfilment, *Heb 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the*

promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Heb 11:14 For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. Heb 11:15 ***And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. Heb 11:16 But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city****.* Which also Christ describes, *Joh 14:1 Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. Joh 14:2* ***In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you****. I go to prepare a place for you. Joh 14:3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.*

There is nothing in this world for the Christian except sorrow but there is a glorious kingdom prepared for us.

So far so good, but we haven't seen if there was a particular son of Jacob, to whom the blessing of Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob, was going to be given. Which of his 12 sons would get God's special blessing, if at all? To find out we will have to go to the end of Jacob's life to find out, and you get a flavour of just what his life was from a remark he makes to Pharaoh, near the end, *Gen 47:8 And Pharaoh said to Jacob, How many are the days of the years of your life? Gen 47:9 And Jacob said to Pharaoh, The days of the years of my camps are a hundred and thirty years.* ***Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life*** *and they have not reached the days of the years of the life of my fathers, in the days of their camps. Gen 47:10 And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from before Pharaoh*. LITV.

That says it all. Of course he was blessed by God with a large and healthy family but was plagued by the infighting and cruelty of his sons, who made his name to stink among the Canaanites, *Gen 34:30 And Jacob said to Simeon and to Levi, You have troubled me, to make me stink among those living in the land, among the Canaanites, and among the Perizzites. And I being few in number, and they gathering against me, they will strike me, and I and my house shall be wasted*. This cruel streak was directed towards the people which they had lived amongst and Jacob did not forget it, as he prophesies of them, upon his death bed, *Gen 49:5 Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. Gen 49:6 O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall. Gen 49:7 Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel*. That is the man who would be the father of the priesthood, a cruel man, unyielding, hard hearted, with whom was entrusted the forgiving of the nation! What was the Lord doing in choosing him? Moses and Aaron are his descendants.

Reuben was guilty of taking one of his father wives, *Gen 35:22 And it came to pass, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine: and Israel heard it. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve*. As the oldest brother he had a responsibility, but all of the sons were jealous of their brother Joseph, and he joined with them to dispose of Joseph*, Gen 37:18 And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him. Gen 37:19 And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh. Gen 37:20 Come now therefore, and* ***let us slay him, and cast him into some pit****, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams. Gen 37:21 And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him. Gen 37:22 And* ***Reuben*** *said unto them, Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him; that he might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again*.

Judah was a key player in that plot, but although he was against killing Joseph, as far as Jacob was concerned, Joseph was dead, *Gen 37:26 And* ***Judah*** *said unto his brethren, What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Gen 37:27 Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmeelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh. And his brethren were content. Gen 37:28 Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt*.

The sons of Jacob were not the type of people you would get to head up the Nation of Israel. Indeed there are many similarities between Jesus disciples and the sons of Jacob, apart from the number 12! The disciples were out of the same jelly mould as the sons of Jacob. They had a hard heart, they were not empathetic, they did not easily forgive, they did not love, and they desired pre-eminence, need I go on? You could have put the disciples in the place of Jacob’s sons and you would not have noticed any difference. But they are no different to you and I, in case you have a superior attitude, because the reason we are like that is due to the all pervading sin, which we commit in abundance.

It is a wonder the Almighty God even gives us a second look, but that shows us how gracious and forgiving He is, *Joe 2:12 Yet even now turn to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning, declares Jehovah. Joe 2:13 Yea, tear your heart, and not your robes; and turn to Jehovah your God. For He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and He pities concerning the evil. Joe 2:14 Who knows if He will turn and have pity and leave a blessing behind Him, a food offering and a drink offering for Jehovah your God?*

70..... Joseph

Preparatory reading: Genesis Chapter 37

We have seen that the sons of Jacob were a pretty disreputable bunch, a bit like you and me. We all try to give off an air of righteousness, self-righteousness, but inside us we are like the Pharisees, we are ravening wolves, and we have to come to terms with that fact, as the Apostle John tells us, *1Jn 1:8* ***If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves****, and the truth is not in us. 1Jn 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1Jn 1:10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*

We can minimalise our sin, and thereby we become hypocrites, or we can pretend that we get more holy with time, but that too is an illusion, *Rom 7:19 For the good that I would I do not:* ***but the evil which I would not, that I do****. Rom 7:20 Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. Rom 7:21 I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me*. The only way we can ever be saved is by the grace of Christ, *Rom 7:24 O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? Rom 7:25 I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin*. And that comes about through the close walk with Christ, *1Jn 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: 1Jn 1:7* ***But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin*****.**

We are in consequence all sinners, from Jacob's brood, to us in the 21st century, and only the fool will not see that*, Rom 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*. And it must follow from that observation, *Rom 3:9 What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; Rom 3:10 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: Rom 3:11* ***There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God***.

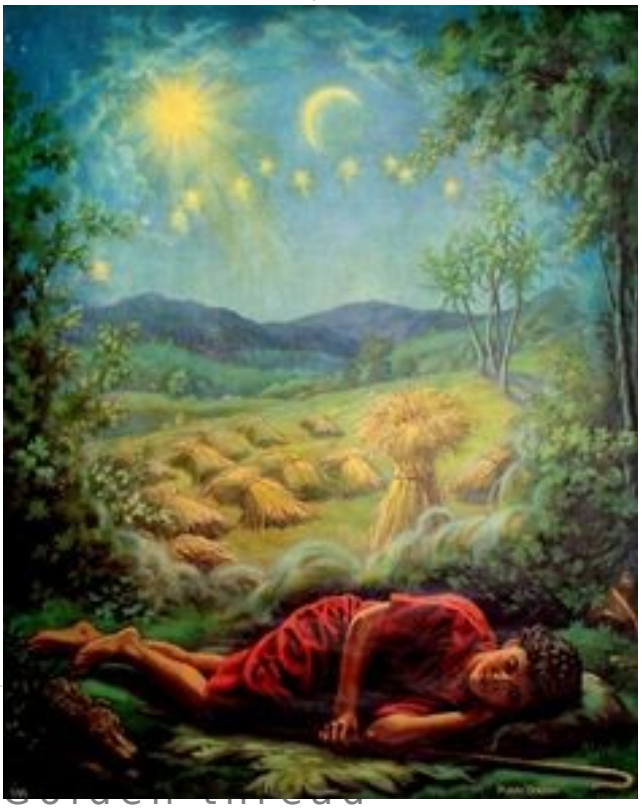
So because we have sinned, and because we possess no righteousness before God, any change in our circumstance before God is purely His love and mercy towards us, *Rom 5:6 Christ died for us at a time when we were helpless and sinful. Rom 5:7 No one is really willing to die for an honest person, though someone might be willing to die for a truly good person. Rom 5:8* ***But God showed how much he loved us by having Christ die for us, even though we were sinful***. CEV.

Now the purpose of me going through that bit of Sovereign Grace, was to show that the children of Jacob, the children of Israel, have absolutely nothing in themselves which can recommend them to God, like us, indeed it is more the

opposite, a hearty disapproval of them. If the sons of Jacob were not good men, why try to make them an example to all mankind, and make them fail so miserably? I hope we shall answer that conundrum as we go on.

Joseph was the first son of the beloved Rachel, and he became a favourite. Jacob by now had undergone a name change at Peniel, to Israel, because he had "prevailed with God". It was just after this that he is confronted with Esau who showed him a lot more kindness than Jacob did when he stole the birthright.

Israel's son Joseph was a prophet, *Gen 41:38 And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is?* He gave two prophecies which we shall look at, when he was about 17 years old. Whether he understood the full import of these, or whether he was responding to the stirring of the spirit within him is not known, *Gen 37:3 And Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was a son of old age to him. And he made a robe reaching to the soles of his feet. Gen 37:4 And his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, and they hated him. And they were not able to speak to him for peace. Gen 37:5 And Joseph dreamed a dream, and told it to his brothers. And they increased to hate him still more. Gen 37:6 And he said to them, Now hear this dream which I have dreamed: Gen 37:7 And, behold!* ***We were binding sheaves in the middle of the field. And, behold, my sheaf rose up and also stood up. And, behold, your sheaves came around and bowed themselves to my sheaf.*** *Gen 37:8 And his brothers said to him, Shall you indeed reign over us, or shall you really rule over us? And they hated him still more because of his dreams, and because of his words. Gen 37:9 And he dreamed still another dream, and told it to his brothers. And he said, Behold, I have dreamed another dream: And,* ***behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars were bowing themselves to me.*** *Gen 37:10 And he told it to his father, and to his brothers. And his father rebuked him, and said to him, What is this dream which you have dreamed? Shall we indeed come to bow ourselves to the earth to you, I, your mother, and your brothers? Gen 37:11 And his brothers were jealous of him. But his father observed the word.* LITV.



These dreams held within them the future plans for the nation of Israel and the relationship to the Messiah. It seems that Joseph is making a precocious boast to his brethren, almost insensitively hurting their feelings, but he was only telling them what he dreamed and they jumped to a conclusion about what it could mean.

The two dreams are:

1. Of wheat sheaves being gathered when all of a sudden one of the bundles, which was Joseph's bundle, stood up and the other bundles bowed down to it.
2. The second dream was like the first, but included the stars (the brothers) and the parents (sun and moon) bowing down before him.

These two dreams alienated the brothers and caused Israel to question him, but were Joseph's dreams about him, and was he just a stand in for the character he was portraying in the dreams?

These dreams show that Israel and his sons were secondary in God's plans and that there was another character arising that would supersede them. The nation of Israel would be secondary to whoever Joseph was representing, and they would do obeisance to Him, which is obviously Christ in its highest spiritual meaning, *Php 2:7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: Php 2:8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Php 2:9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: Php 2:**10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth**; Php 2:11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*. This shows that things in heaven and things on earth would acknowledge Jesus as the Supreme Being.

It is not Israel that should be the focus of Prophecy, but Christ alone, and Israel must learn that and so must all people, particularly the Christians who call upon God. Many Christians look to the Jews as being a pertinent sign of the end times instead of looking to Jesus, and they have not understood Joseph's prophecies. The dreams did hold some earthly meaning as well, but Israel and his sons thought too much of themselves, as being the centre of the prophecies, but all prophecy has Jesus as its meaning, *Rev 19:10 And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: **for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy***.

Joseph gets taken to Egypt as a slave, to the house of Potiphar, and when you think things couldn't get worse, they do, as Potiphar's wife falsely accused Joseph of attempted rape after he rejected her sexual advances, resulting in his imprisonment. In prison he meets a butler and a baker and prophecies the outcome of their fate, the baker is executed and the butler is released. Eventually the butler remembers Joseph when Pharaoh has a dream, and it is through this dream that Joseph is restored.

If you think I am skipping over part of Genesis, you are right, I am, because I presume that you can read and you are following the whole story. I am merely highlighting the important parts for the purpose of this narrative, which is to see

Jesus in the Older Testament. And I find in Joseph one of the most Christ like of the patriarchs, who for those times is near faultless.

Joseph not only saves his adopted nation, Egypt, but saves his people Israel. This comes about as we have said, through a dream given to Pharaoh which he interprets, *Gen 41:28 This is the thing which I have spoken unto Pharaoh: What God is about to do he sheweth unto Pharaoh. Gen 41:29 Behold, there come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt: Gen 41:30 And there shall arise after them seven years of famine; and all the plenty shall be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine shall consume the land; Gen 41:31 And the plenty shall not be known in the land by reason of that famine following; for it shall be very grievous. Gen 41:32 And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass. Gen 41:33 Now therefore let Pharaoh look out a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. Gen 41:34 Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, and take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt in the seven plenteous years. Gen 41:35 And let them gather all the food of those good years that come, and lay up corn under the hand of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities. Gen 41:36 And that food shall be for store to the land against the seven years of famine, which shall be in the land of Egypt; that the land perish not through the famine*.

If Joseph had the dream and had given the interpretation of it, it could be said that it was a “put up job” and that Joseph could have fitted the narrative to suit himself. But the dream came through another person, and so he has another witness to the events to come, like Daniel interpreting Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. Because Joseph saved the people from famine, he was rewarded by Pharaoh and given a new name, *Gen 41:45 And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnathpaaneah; and he gave him to wife Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On. And Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt*. Zaphnathpaaneah is highly significant, and this version gives it meaning, *Gen 41:45 And he turned his name, and called him in the Egyptian tongue the saviour of the world. And he gave him to wife Aseneth, the daughter of Putiphare, priest of Heliopolis. Then Joseph went out to the land of Egypt*. DRB.

It seems that there are over 60 comparisons that we can make between Joseph and Jesus that it makes you wonder whether this part of Genesis is really the life of Christ? Let us just look at a few of the similarities. Joseph was a shepherd just as Jesus is the good Shepherd, as Joseph’s brothers plotted to kill him the Jews also plotted to kill Christ, Joseph was stripped of his coat just as Jesus was stripped of His coat, Joseph was sold for the price of 20 pieces of silver and Jesus was sold for thirty pieces of silver, Joseph became a servant and Jesus became a servant, Joseph was falsely accused and Jesus was falsely accused, Joseph attempted no defence before his accusers and Jesus gave no defence before His, Joseph was numbered with transgressors, namely the steward and the baker and Jesus was also crucified and with two thieves, Joseph’s received honour and

every knee will bow to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, Joseph was thirty years old when he began his ministry and Jesus was thirty when He began His public ministry, Joseph was revealed to his brothers at their second coming and Jesus is to be revealed to Israel (**US**) at His second coming.

These are only a few of the similarities and you might like to find others as part of your devotional studies. The point is that Jesus made Himself known in a shadow (Jesus) to the people of the Old Testament, and anyone reading the New Testament correctly cannot fail to see this. Joseph's life was cloaked in Jesus, and he showed a better way to his brothers, certainly about the forgiveness of past sin, *Gen 50:15 And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him. Gen 50:16 And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying, Gen 50:17 So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him. Gen 50:18 And his brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold, we be thy servants. Gen 50:19 And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? Gen 50:20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Gen 50:21 Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them*.

Joseph's last prophecy links us to the next book, *Gen 50:24 And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Gen 50:25 And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence. Gen 50:26 So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt*.

I shall return to Joseph again later on DV.